



Alexander Ugglä/Finnish Red Cross

## **Annual Programme Report 2023**

**MFA Programme grant 2022-2025**

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# Annual Report 2023

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## Yhteenveto ohjelmasta

Vuosi 2023 oli toinen toteutusvuosi Suomen Punaisen Ristin kehitysyhteistyöohjelman nelivuotisesta (2022–2025) ohjelmakaudesta. Muutamia hankesuunnitteluvaiheita lukuun ottamatta, ohjelman toteutus oli täydessä vauhdissa kaikissa neljässätoista ohjelmamaassa. Tulokset ja Suomen Punaisen Ristin kansainvälisen avun linjauksen mukaisesti kehitysyhteistyöohjelman alla toteutettavat hankkeet ja maaohjelmat kohdentuivat yhteen tai useampaan neljästä temaattisesta tavoitteesta: 1) ilmasto- ja katastrofiriskeihin varautuminen ja niiden vähentäminen, 2) naisten ja tyttöjen seksuaali- ja lisääntymisterveyden ja -oikeuksien edistäminen, 3) humanitaarisen avun ja kehitysyhteistyön välisen jatkumon vahvistaminen konfliktien ja kriisien keskellä sekä 4) vahvojen ja inklusiivisten paikallisten Punaisen Ristin ja Punaisen Puolikuun toimijoiden tukeminen.

Suomen Punaisen Ristin kehitysyhteistyöohjelma kohdistui hauraimiin maissa eläviin ihmisiin ja yhteisöihin, jotka ovat alttiita niin ilmastomuutoksen voimistamille katastrofeille ja pitkäkestoisille vaikutuksille kuin konflikteille. Afrikassa ohjelma kohdentui erityisesti Itä-Afrikkaan ja Sahelin alueelle. Aasiassa toimittiin pitkäaikaisten kumppanien kanssa ja Lähi-idässä tuki ohjattiin Jemeniin. Malawin ohjelma päättyi vuoden lopussa ja aiemmin tehdyn päätöksen mukaisesti Suomen Punainen Risti ei jatka siellä konsortio-ohjelman tukemista vaan keskittyy jatkossa entistä enemmän Sahelin ja Itä-Afrikan kehitys- ja humanitaarisiin haasteisiin.

Vuonna 2023 Suomen Punaisen Ristin kansainvälisen avustustoiminnan kokonaisvolyyymi oli 59,3 miljoonaa euroa, joka jatkoi Ukrainan konfliktin jälkeistä, poikkeuksellisen suurta tasoa. Tästä kehitysyhteistyöhön käytettiin 15,3 miljoonaa euroa (26 %). Ulkoministeriön rahoittaman kehitysyhteistyöohjelman toteutuneet kulut olivat noin 7,5 miljoonaa euroa. Ohjelman omarahoitusosuus oli 17 %. Ohjelma tavoitti 15 hankkeessa 650 000 ihmistä. Näistä välittömistä hyödynsaajista 60 % oli naisia ja 40 % miehiä. Saimme mm. 126 600 ihmistä yhteisöjen varautumistoimien piiriin ja tarjosimme 93 100 ihmiselle seksuaali- ja lisääntymisterveyden palveluita. Valtaosin ohjelmassa saatiin suunnitellut hankkeet toimeenpantua. Jatkuvalle budjettiseurannalle, suunnitelmien päivityksillä ja käyttötarkoituksenmuutoksilla saatiin tehokkaasti toteutettua ohjelmia ja vastattua muuttuviin tarpeisiin. Kokonaisbudjetistä kuitenkin jäätettiin kahden konsortiohankkeen raportoinnin haasteiden vuoksi. Jemenin ja Nigerin hankkeiden talousraportit saatiin konsortiota vetävältä eurooppalaiselta kumppanilta vasta tilinpäätöksen jälkeen.

Vuosi 2023 oli erittäin vaikea vuosi niin humanitaarisesti kuin turvallisuuden näkökulmasta. Vuotta leimasi toista vuotta jatkunut Ukrainan konflikti, levottomuudet Sahelin maissa, Afganistanin ja Myanmarin kriisien syveneminen, mutta myös uudet, äkilliset ja hitaasti syntyvät kriisit, kuten kuivuuden pahentama ruokaturvattomuus tai tulvakatastrofit ohjelmamaissa. Suomen Punainen Risti tuki myös kansainvälisen Punaisen Ristin avustusoperaatiota Syyriassa, Turkissa ja Marokossa tuhoisien maanjäristysten jälkeen sekä ohjasi apua Gazan humanitaariseen kriisiin. Vaikka kaikki eivät suoraan ohjelmatyöhön vaikuttaneet, kertovat ne kasvaneesta avun tarpeesta ja avun monimutkaistumisesta. Ohjelmatuella jatkettiin kriisi- ja perusterveydenhuollon palveluiden tukemista pitkittyneiden konfliktien ja väkivallan vaivaamilla alueilla, joissa valtion palvelut ovat puutteelliset kuten Afganistanissa, Jemenissä, Sahelissa ja Somaliassa. Punaisen Ristin kansainvälisen komitean (ICRC) kanssa toteutettava kriisiviestintään ja konfliktialueilla tapahtuvan viestinnän kehittämiseen tähtäävä Safer Access Framework (SAF) hanke edisti avustustyöntekijöiden turvallisuutta ja toiminnan edellytyksiä Itä-Afrikassa ja Sahelissa.

Läpileikkaavissa tavoitteissa jatkettiin erityisesti tasa-arvon ja vammaisinklusion edistämistä sekä ilmastokestävyttä. Abilis-yhteistyön avulla valtavirtaistettiin vammaisinklusiota niin hankkeissa kuin kasvattamalla omaa ja kumppanien osaamista. Ilmastokestävytyden osalta aloitettiin oman toiminnan hiilijalanjäljen laskeminen sekä tehtiin paljon erilaisia kestäviä hanketoimia, kuten aurinkoenergiaa Etiopiassa ja Somaliassa, tehokkaita keittoliesiä Etiopiassa ja puunistutuskampanjoita Keniassa, Malawissa, Burundissa ja Sierra Leonessa. Vaikuttamistyössä jatkettiin vahvaa panostamista humanitaaristen vaikutusten huomioimisen edistämiseksi ilmastopolitiikassa niin kansallisesti, Euroopan tasolla kuin globaalisti. Työtä tehtiin ruohonjuuritasolla kansallisten yhdistysten kanssa sekä yhdessä ilmatieteen laitosten kanssa Malawissa, Nepalissa ja Itä-Afrikassa. Suomen Punainen Risti muodollisesti yhteistyön Punaisen Ristin ilmastokeskuksen kanssa edistääkseen niin teknistä tukea hankkeilla kuin vahvistaakseen vaikuttamistyötä. Suomen Punainen Risti osallistui myös ensi kertaa YK:n ilmastokokoukseen osana ympäristöministeriön kautta rekisteröityneitä sidosryhmiä ja järjesti kokouksessa Ilmatieteen laitoksen ja ulkoministeriön kanssa tapahtuman ihmislähtöisistä ennakkovaroitusjärjestelmistä.

# 1. Programme progress in 2023

## 1.1 Global context and risks

### Mounting humanitarian challenges leading to increased focus on partners' humanitarian capacities

Global humanitarian needs are at a record high, unsustainable level. The number of people in need worldwide has increased by an average of one fifth each year this decade. At the same time, the funding gap has grown. The year 2023 was the first in which international humanitarian funding decreased, while humanitarian needs were higher than ever before – and only about one third of the funding required was received. Both local and international conflicts are causing significant human suffering, are becoming protracted, and are hampering development gains and resilience of societies everywhere, but especially in the global south, in places like the Sahel, Horn of Africa, Afghanistan and Myanmar. Climate change and biodiversity loss have made crises even more challenging: the number of disasters related to extreme weather events has increased by over 40% in the last 20 years.

The global compounded crises meant a busy year for the Finnish Red Cross (FRC). A total of 44 million euros was spent on humanitarian aid in 2023, in response to high-profile global crises like Ukraine and Gaza, earthquakes in Turkey, Syria and Morocco, long-lasting and forgotten humanitarian crises in Afghanistan, Yemen, Myanmar, Sahel and Syria, and drought and food insecurity in the Horn of Africa, namely Ethiopia, South Sudan, and Somalia.

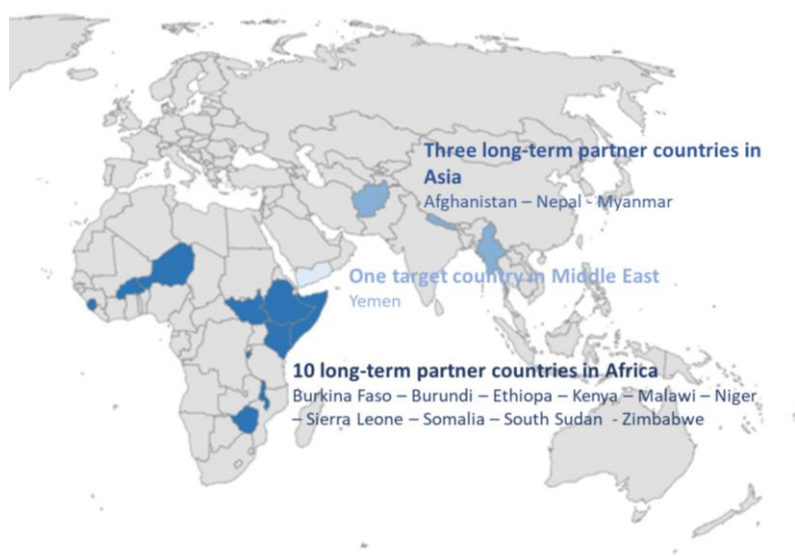
The decline in the global humanitarian situation also continued to impact the implementation and targeting of the FRC development programme. For long-term programming, the Programme funded by the Ministry for Foreign Affairs (MFA) remained as the cornerstone, representing more than half of FRC's overall long-term programme funding. FRC's development programming continued to focus on disaster preparedness and climate change adaptation, health of women and girls, ensuring sustainable development during crises, and strengthening local action and participation, as per the FRC's Strategic framework for international aid.

In 2023, FRC's MFA-funded Programme was implemented in fourteen long-term partner countries, of which ten in Africa, one in the Middle East, and three in Asia. Twelve of the partner countries were among the 46 least developed countries, while seven were classified as countries at a very high risk according to the INFORM Risk Index.

FRC's focus on fragile and conflict and disaster-prone countries add value to the Programme by reaching out to populations in most vulnerable situations and communities at highest risk, often in areas where many other actors are not involved. The FRC and its partners address key gaps and needs in the middle of the humanitarian–development nexus. Especially in contexts of protracted crises, the separation between the two is difficult and artificial. The Red Cross Red Crescent National Societies were involved in different community-based actions, traditional development cooperation actions such as water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) improvements and health promotion but also in service provision, preparedness and humanitarian action.

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In 2023, as before, the FRC used budget reallocations to adjust the programmes at country levels to ensure best response to changing situations, whether they were operational changes stemming from slowed-down or scaled-up implementation, or external challenges, such as issues with the banking sector in Myanmar, or fluctuating currency, security or compliance risks requiring a delay of activities or additional measures, or, naturally, changes in needs. In Zimbabwe, the FRC used MFA development funding to trigger early action ahead of drought to support the target



communities. A repurposing request was made to respond to humanitarian needs due to localised natural disasters and food insecurity in Niger, Yemen, Somalia and Ethiopia.

National Society Development (NSD) and building the organisational capacities of local partners to become more sustainable and accountable in their service delivery remained both as a separate focus area with targeted actions to increase financial sustainability or safe humanitarian access, and as a cross-cutting objective throughout the Programme. Branch and volunteer capacity support was an integral part of all country-level programming to ensure sustained impact of the local actions supported with the Programme funding. The FRC emphasises the importance of NSD in delivering the localisation agenda of building stronger local organisations.

### **Robust risk management ensuring quality programming**

Risk management is an integral part of the FRC's performance management system. It is embedded in operational and financial planning as well as monitoring and reporting procedures. The FRC has clear processes for risk management and robust actions for preventing misuse and addressing them quickly, effectively, and transparently. These include trainings, whistleblowing, oversight at different levels, regular spot checks and monitoring, as well as structured audits, reviews and evaluations. In challenging operational environments, local partners sometimes have to take significant risks to carry out their activities.

In cases of suspected misuse, when assessing e.g. the need to suspend funding, it is important not only to mitigate reputational and financial risks but also to evaluate the operational risks that the partner might face with the mitigation action. The FRC believes that it is important to advance risk sharing, including identifying risks together with partners, recognising high-risk operational environments, and enabling support for gaps identified (e.g. in financial management) as part of the Programme's capacity building support. Flexibility and adaptivity of funding are also risk management tools, allowing quick reaction to changing situations, as evidenced in 2023.

Risk management is also a crucial part of FRC's partnership processes, including a thorough risk assessment conducted at the beginning of a new partnership, and continuous monitoring as part of the formal partnership process. In 2023, a new bilateral partnership process started with the Somali Red Crescent Society (SRCS), succeeding the ECHO-funded Pilot Programmatic Partnership (PPP) project implemented already since 2022. During autumn 2023, the FRC conducted capacity and risk assessments and preparations for moving to completely bilateral cooperation with the SRCS from 2024 onwards.

The Programme-level Risk Matrix provided a good framework for monitoring, anticipating and mitigating certain global and high-level risks. In 2023, the political instability risks materialised especially in Niger during the coup in July 2023. While the coup brought about immediate security and implementation concerns, eventually the role of and operational space for the Niger Red Cross did not change significantly. Needs, access and security remained similar, and societally, the coup did not result in wide-spread unrest.

In terms of security of staff and volunteers, the FRC had to evacuate one of its staff members with an ICRC flight during field monitoring in Puntland due to violence related to the presidential election. No other major security incidents were reported in FRC Programme countries in 2023.

For prevention of sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment (PSEAH), the FRC has robust mechanisms in place, including training, whistleblowing, and monitoring. As part of the ECHO partnership agreement, the FRC also reports on PSEAH at the global level annually. Among staff members of all partners, there was only one reported allegation of harassment, not related to programmes and staff supported by donors, and dealt with by the National Society.

In 2023, the FRC continued to manage risks associated with international aid especially at project and partner levels. Risk management responsibilities within the organisation are divided, with the primary responsibility for identifying and entering risks into the system and implementing mitigation activities lying at the field level. A clear process is in place for regular risk follow-up, which includes formal risk meetings.

## **1.2 Implementation progress, localisation, adaptivity and sustainability**

In 2023, FRC's MFA-funded Development Programme reached a total of 650,028 individuals, of whom approximately 60% women and 40% men, through 15 projects. A summary of the aggregated programme-level results for 2023 is available in Annex 1. In addition to collecting data based on defined indicators, the FRC continues to assess

programme performance through baselines, endlines, and evaluations of country projects. In 2023, data for the annual report was compiled at the programme level from 24 FRC-supported projects. The number of projects collecting data disaggregated by disability increased from three in 2022 to nine in 2023, reaching a total of 15,215 people across these nine projects. Although this data is still not considered fully reliable or representative, the increase in projects collecting and reporting disability-disaggregated data is a notable achievement.

The thematic flagships stemming from FRC's Strategic framework for international aid continued to guide the MFA-funded Development Programme. The focus on climate change in terms of advocacy and programmes through climate-smart disaster preparedness and risk reduction remained a priority for the FRC both because of the urgency of climate change and its prior identification as a key focus for the FRC. The humanitarian imperative to protect human lives and reduce suffering is becoming increasingly difficult due to climate change and requires ever stronger investment in readiness, preparedness, and proactive action.

In 2023, the adoption of a climate-smart approach started to show significant results. Awareness sessions led to a better understanding of the long-term impacts of climate change and extreme weather at community level, and a disaster risk reduction culture from warnings and forecasts at national levels to end users was being developed. Studies, assessments, and trainings on climate risks fed into the incorporation of climate-smart activities in programmes, including from risk reduction to livelihood activities. Community-based and led approaches were promoted, with specific attention to the role of women and persons with disabilities. Heat action received attention in Asia, while drought and floods were prominent in Africa. National Societies' work covered local action in remote communities and applying the skills and equipment in fast response to warnings, contributing to a systemic change and engaging in policy influence, and sharing learnings at national, regional, and global events. Collaboration with meteorological agencies and public authorities increased to ensure that warnings lead to action and overall early warning systems are inclusive and people centred.

The year 2023 was a full year of implementation of the wide-ranging health programmes. The FRC Programme continued to focus on women's and girls' health via numerous community-based actions, promotion activities and increasing access to services. The FRC-supported Red Cross Red Crescent Societies engaged women, their husbands, community and religious leaders, traditional birth attendants and community health workers to encourage attendance at antenatal care and safe delivery. This led to a significant increase in postnatal care visits, newborn breastfeeding, and exclusive breastfeeding.

The FRC also advocated for the fundamental rights of women and girls to live lives free of violence and abuse. Efforts to eliminate harmful traditional practices, particularly female genital mutilation (FGM) and child, early, and forced marriages (CEFM), continue in many countries. This included the continuation of innovative and inclusive community engagement activities especially with duty bearers and different stakeholder groups to change existing social norms. The FRC also supported the implementation of a wide range of water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) activities. These increased access to safe water and sanitation for many people. The approach is based on a sustainable model where local committees oversee and maintain the water projects. In all locations, WASH hardware was coupled with comprehensive hygiene promotion, including menstrual hygiene management (MHM), especially targeting women and children, to improve health through better services and changed behaviour.

The year 2023 saw increased investments and advances in the key partnerships supporting the implementation of thematic flagships, i.e. Abilis Foundation for disability inclusion, the Finnish Meteorological Institute (FMI) for Early Warning Early Action (EWEA), and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) for the Safer Access Framework (SAF). In 2023 the FRC entered into a formal Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Red Cross Climate Centre (RCCC). This MoU formalised the earlier case-by-case cooperation with the RCCC. It is used both for the FRC to support the joint global advocacy objectives with the RCCC as well as to ensure sufficient technical support from the RCCC to FRC programmes in different countries. In 2023 this technical support was used in Nepal's heat action work.

With the ICRC, the SAF cooperation was stalling to a degree due to challenges in recruiting the technical Communication Adviser to West Africa. However, the Adviser deployed to East Africa managed to significantly support the FRC country teams and host National Society partners in implementing a wide range of communication

activities. In 2023, cooperation with the ICRC in Asia was launched with feasibility studies for both Afghanistan and Myanmar, the key SAF contexts in Asia.

### **Red Cross Red Crescent in challenging contexts**

The role of civil society and especially of actors like the Red Cross Red Crescent is crucial in difficult and authoritarian contexts. Long-term and practical work can strengthen civil society and find ways to support basic services, alleviate humanitarian needs and influence the situation of marginalised groups. This is vital in countries such as Afghanistan where supporting civil society organisations is essential for the delivery basic services. The FRC continued to channel MFA funding, both humanitarian and development, to the Afghan Red Crescent Society (ARCS) through the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC).

ARCS's female staff and volunteers continued their work to provide health and social services to women and children. In addition, the IFRC continued to conduct humanitarian diplomacy and advocate for access to female staff and volunteers to enable them to carry on with their work. ARCS's added value is also in its reach to most vulnerable communities and people, and in the ability of the system to also support e.g. immunisation and emergency response, as evidenced during the earthquakes in Herat in October 2023.

Myanmar is another one of the Programme's most complex and challenging contexts. It is an example of an operating environment in which adaptive and flexible programming is critical for implementation. Administratively, difficulties in crediting funds and lengthy approval processes caused delays and called for administrative solutions, for example in terms of an MoU between the FRC and the Myanmar Red Cross Society as well as constant dialogue with the Ministry of Health. Conflict and instability in certain project areas hindered community gatherings and restricted access, resulting in changes in activities. Additionally, monitoring and mentoring challenges, including remote engagement due to clearance issues, impacted the project's progress and meant alternative means of monitoring and support to the local teams.

### **Ensuring sustainability through local partnerships and adaptive support**

The sustainability of the FRC Programme's impact and effectiveness is closely linked to partnerships with local Red Cross Red Crescent Societies as well as collaboration with local governments and other stakeholders. All National Societies have legal obligations and roles as auxiliaries to local and national authorities. Their capacity to fulfil this auxiliary role and maintain established relationships in their respective countries is a key factor in the sustainability of the Programme. Therefore, supporting these actors in a long-term and locally adaptive manner, particularly by strengthening their programming capacity and preparedness, is a crucial part of the Programme and promotes the localisation and sustainability of the support provided.

In Nepal, the community resilience project concluded with a formal transfer of ownership of its major investments to the local government, community committees, and local Red Cross units. This transfer included a sustainability plan, co-developed in 2022 with the local government, community, and the Nepal Red Cross. The plan comprises a roster of trained volunteers and the formation of a steering committee responsible for maintaining and mobilising these resources. These trained volunteers played a crucial role in the Jajarkot earthquake response operation in 2023.

In Kenya, the Climate Smart Agriculture (CSA) project supported by the FRC was completed in 2023. However, the CSA initiative will continue and expand with funding from the World Food Programme and the Kenya Climate Smart Agriculture project. The nine farmers' groups in Chewani and Chewele, which received support through the FRC-funded CSA project, will serve as models for the new initiative and will continue receiving support in value chain processes. The Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock has committed itself to providing extension services to ensure the proper management of trees and tree products, further strengthening the sustainability of these efforts.

These examples from Nepal and Kenya highlight the critical role of stakeholder collaboration and coordination with relevant authorities in ensuring sustainability. Additionally, the CSA project showcases the importance of empowerment and building local fundraising capacity: CSA champions were trained in resource mobilisation and proposal development to enhance their skills in sourcing funding from climate change advocacy and other partners within the country.

Supportive legal frameworks and relatively strong state structures in Nepal and Kenya create an operating environment conducive to sustainability. In contrast, ensuring sustainability is more challenging in contexts of conflict and political instability. In Somalia and Yemen, the FRC is supporting the local Red Crescent Societies to provide essential health services. In Somalia, the health programme aligns with national health plans and priorities as well as the Somali Red Crescent Society's strategic plan and policies. The project's alignment with both government and SRCS priorities ensures its sustainability. In Somalia, particularly in Somaliland, health authorities are becoming stronger and have the capacity to guide health actors.

In Yemen, however, the situation is more complex due to the no-peace, no-war environment. Yemen's health system has collapsed in many areas, with more than 60% of Ministry of Public Health and Population (MoPHP) facilities not functioning. The capacity of the health authorities to support coordination is limited, making the outlook for sustainability different from that of Somalia. Consequently, the exit strategy in Yemen cannot rely on the MoPHP's capacity.

### **Incorporating evaluation recommendations and ensuring learning and accountability**

In 2023, the FRC conducted three evaluations on projects in Nepal, Malawi, and Myanmar to assess their overall outcomes. In Kenya, the Climate-smart agriculture project opted for a lessons learned workshop instead of a final evaluation, as the project will continue under other funding schemes. As part of the management response process, findings and recommendations relevant to the FRC and its partners were identified and integrated into programme development. For instance in Nepal, recommendations from the Integrated Community Resilience Project (ICRP) project are being used to inform the implementation of the new Reducing Disaster Impact through Inclusive Preparedness and Anticipatory Action (REDI) project. In Kenya, findings from the lessons learned workshop were partially addressed during the project's phasing-out phase, and these lessons will guide the second phase of implementation under new funding.

FRC's thematic working groups, established in 2022, continued to support the implementation of thematic priorities and to strengthen institutional capacities within the FRC. Additionally, the FRC launched its Knowledge for Impact learning programme in 2023, with initial training modules focusing on Emergency Health, Disability Inclusion, National Society Development, and the Nexus.

In 2023, the FRC also organised an Africa regional meeting for its staff, reflecting on experiences, challenges, and opportunities in FRC's programmes across the continent. Discussions centred on ensuring that FRC's programmes remain relevant, effective, and sustainable amidst changing contexts and community needs. The meeting emphasised strengthening FRC's role and added value as a partner and supporter of National Societies in Africa, rather than just an implementer or a donor. Another critical topic was improving FRC's monitoring, evaluation, and learning systems to ensure accountability and facilitate learning from both successes and failures.

## **2. Programme achievements per thematic focus areas**

### **2.1 Focus area 1: Climate-smart disaster preparedness and risk reduction**

#### **Community awareness and capacity building**

Awareness and mobilisation sessions conducted in Burundi, Ethiopia, Kenya, Myanmar, Malawi, Nepal, Niger, and Zimbabwe improved the capacities of communities to adapt to climate change. In Afghanistan, Myanmar, and Somalia, communities were sensitised on health risks and impacts associated with recurrent droughts, floods, extreme heat and cold. A community-based surveillance system (CBS) was used in Somalia to monitor and detect disease outbreaks and seasonal fluctuation in diseases.

Trainings and refresher trainings helped community members and volunteers identify and locate risks, assess their impacts on their communities through mapping exercises, and provided them with skills to plan relevant activities to reduce the risks, and address the specific needs of women and persons with disabilities. In Nepal, engaging youth through Y-ADAPT trainings proved particularly effective with multiple benefits including motivation, learning, and confidence building. After the training, young persons were able to address climate change in their daily lives and conduct community awareness sessions with the support of their teachers. In Myanmar, trainings at school enabled the setting up of School Safety Plans and the establishment of safe routes and safe evacuation places. Information,



education and communication (IEC) materials, such as exercise books, were distributed to five schools in Kenya, and school clubs were established in all the schools in the target area in Zimbabwe.

Farmers in Kenya, Zimbabwe, and Malawi received training in climate-smart agricultural practices, and as a result, reported improved harvests. These practices included incorporating tree nurseries and woodlots into livelihood activities, water harvesting techniques, soil and water conservation methods, conservation agriculture, adoption of drought tolerant and early maturing crop varieties and drought-tolerant seeds, diversifying crops and avoiding riverbank cultivation. Farmers were also encouraged to collaborate with extension staff and utilise weather information, enhancing their ability to adapt to changing climate conditions. The lessons learned workshop and FRC monitoring mission in Kenya showed that enhanced capacities facilitated a common approach to climate-smart agriculture and a collaborative framework between the Kenya Red Cross Society, government line ministries, and the community.

Utilisation of weather forecasts improved in Zimbabwe, Rwanda, Tanzania, and Kenya, where climate and weather information were produced and disseminated through community meetings and radio spots in collaboration with relevant departments and authorities ensuring that communities were well informed. In Ethiopia, improved community awareness of listening to local radios increased people's access to weather and meteorological data.

Efforts to ensure inclusive and accessible information and education to all members of the community were made across several projects. In Zimbabwe, IEC materials were translated into the local language, Tonga, and trainings were conducted in the local language to ensure broader understanding and participation. Persons with disabilities were engaged through a disability inclusion assessment to inform the activities.

#### **Assessments and studies provided foundations for activities**

Enhanced vulnerability and capacity assessments (EVCA) for the remaining villages were conducted in Myanmar in 2023. Other projects built on previously conducted EVCA or climate analyses, which were key to understanding the impacts of climate change, hazard exposure and vulnerabilities, and to guiding the project activities. EVCA tools created space to talk with communities about the changes and encouraged them to incorporate their priorities into the disaster risk reduction plans developed through the EVCA process.

In 2023, two specific studies were conducted to guide the programming in early warning early action. A hazard perception study was commissioned in Kenya, Rwanda, and Tanzania to form a basis for the co-creation of community-led, accessible, and usable early warning services for the multi-country, multi-stakeholder regional project. The studies found that awareness of early warning systems, alerts, and their dissemination was very low. People were also not familiar with the anticipatory action approach, and limited early actions were taken proactively and ahead of forecast hazards. As part of the collaboration with meteorological agencies, the Kenya Meteorological Department made changes to rain forecasts based on the hazard perception study findings.

In Nepal, a Forecast-based Financing (FbF) field scoping study assessed the potential for the implementation of anticipatory action and identified key areas of action to make early warning early action functional and effective. In addition, University of Lund (Sweden) students undertook field research on "The role of traditional knowledge for community resilience in a changing climate" in communities where the FRC had supported integrated community resilience.

#### **Community actions strengthened resilience**

In 2023, Community Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) and EVCA Action Plans were developed and implemented in multiple countries to strengthen communities' resilience. The plans were aligned with authorities' plans for greater sustainability of actions. Different structures were established or strengthened to implement these action plans. In Burundi, community risk reduction and disaster management committees were formed. In Sierra Leone, community action plans were reviewed, and community members discussed participatory approaches to carrying out pending tasks. The planning of nature-based solutions, and water-related and environmental measures were conducted in a participatory manner, with community members coming together to discuss suggestions and recommendations of the plans. This fostered community cohesion and collective ownership of the plans and built social capital.

In Zimbabwe, community-identified projects led to women and persons with disabilities benefiting from nature-based solutions such as nutrition gardens, community gardens, and access to water. They were also involved in DRR activities, including the construction of rocket-loreña cookstoves and tree planting. Trees were planted and roofs enforced in Malawi to prevent damage from strong winds.

Institutional preparedness and response capacity building of local Red Cross Red Crescent volunteers was a part of the work across countries. Volunteers were mobilised to respond to emergencies in several countries, including in an earthquake operation in Afghanistan, which the FRC supported with its disaster relief funding. The volunteers were trained as part of the FRC-funded health/WASH programme. In Myanmar, response preparedness was a major accomplishment, with trained project staff carrying out a cash and voucher (CVA) distribution as part of the Complex Emergency operation, funded by MFA humanitarian funding, and responding to local fires and water shortages. With MFA development funding, enabled by the repurposing of funds mechanism, National Societies responded to floods in Somalia late 2023 with search and rescue activities and to extended drought in Ethiopia's Afar region by distributing food aid.

### **Environmental sustainability and climate change mitigation**

In 2023, greater emphasis was placed on addressing environmental impacts and reducing emissions across various projects. In Ethiopia, a solar-powered water supply scheme for spring water development was set up, while health clinics in Somalia were solarised. Several small-scale measures were taken in communities to promote environmentally sustainable development, such as avoiding the use of plastic in Nepal and Burundi, and the use of efficient cooking stoves to replace charcoal burning in Ethiopia or reducing water pollution in Burundi. Environmental clubs in schools in Kenya embraced environmental preservation and engaged in various activities. Availability of water in schools and communities was improved by digging wells and building community water systems, which mitigated the increased water scarcity in Afghanistan. Tree planting was promoted and done in Kenya, Malawi, Burundi, and Sierra Leone. Tree planting initiatives contribute to the ambitious Pan-African Tree Planting and Care initiative of the IFRC network.

The increased understanding of environmental impacts led to the identification of potential for further environmentally sustainable actions, which will inform future planning. In Kenya, solar energy could have been used for water pumping, and more emphasis could have been placed on planting indigenous trees. In Yemen, progress was made in reducing fuel consumption and generator use through solar systems. Waste management improvements were identified as important but challenging due to lacking infrastructure. In Zimbabwe, areas of work were identified in which the environmental impact of the project interventions could be mitigated through the adoption of alternative practices.

In Sierra Leone, project communities reviewed and updated their local by-laws to address issues such as poor environmental sanitation, deforestation, coal burning, and slash-and-burn farming practices. A participatory approach, engaging all community members from the start, was a critical element for ensuring acceptance of the defined by-laws. The development of by-laws has the potential to be replicated in other countries.

In Finland, the Finnish Red Cross started measuring the carbon footprint of the Headquarters and international humanitarian operations in 2023, using 2022 as the base year. This calculation will be expanded to other units and district offices during 2024 and further to the local branches during 2025–2026. The FRC is also continuously looking for more sustainable options for its humanitarian response in procurement, both domestically and internationally, and also commissioned, for example, a study on the feasibility of using solar power vs. diesel generators in field hospitals. Given the short lifespan of the field hospitals, the diesel generator was found less polluting and more cost-efficient.

### **Increased weather-related hazards call for anticipatory action**

Although anticipatory action progressed at different levels across the target countries, sustained efforts on and investments in evidence, advocacy and policy will be required to ensure that actions can be taken ahead of forecast events, reducing the impacts on the most vulnerable. National Societies supported authorities in developing disaster risk management (DRM) plans and anticipatory action approaches based on identified hazards and vulnerabilities and engaged in the strengthening of early warning systems through workshops, technical discussions, and drills.

The adoption of a forecast and trigger-based methodology improved readiness to anticipate hazards and positioned the National Society to play a leading role in the anticipatory action sector in Zimbabwe. The Early Action Protocol (EAP) for Drought developed in 2019–2022 was activated in Zimbabwe in September 2023 and funded with MFA development funding, including the distribution of drought-tolerant seeds and the provision of dipping and dosing chemicals for livestock. The activation of the EAP has highlighted the benefits of supporting activations through longer-term programming, emphasising the need for strong coordination mechanisms to support the implementation of early actions without negatively impacting long-term activities.

In Myanmar, a simplified EAP (SEAP) was developed for heatwaves, and most of the early actions are activities that the branch and communities can implement with additional support from the project if needed. In the Philippines, the FRC Regional Adviser has supported the review of the flood and typhoon EAP, to be submitted to the validation committee in 2024, and the planning of EAPs in conflict-affected areas.

The sustainability and scalability of anticipatory action remains a challenge, and the FRC has engaged in initiatives that explore the concept of connecting anticipatory action with Shock Responsive Social Protection (SRSP) programming.

As well as supporting the reliability of hydrometeorological data in these ways, the FRC also supports a flexible approach to decision-making in risk-informed anticipatory action and early actions. The project in Nepal had set up a financial instrument called the crisis modifier that could be activated at the onset of a small-scale disaster associated with pre-identified hazards in pre-identified locations. The crisis modifier was activated twice in 2023, both for early response. The crisis modifier was also activated to respond to flooding in the Delken community in Sierra Leone. In Zimbabwe, the project piloted the crisis modifier for anticipatory action, which extended the impact and reach of the interventions under the Early Action Protocol.

Globally, the FRC remained a member of the Forecast-based Action (FbA) by the DREF Validation Committee along with fifteen other National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and the IFRC. The Validation Committee reviews and validates EAPs and simplified EAPs (lighter, more flexible plans) to be funded by the IFRC Disaster Response Emergency Fund (DREF). During 2023, 12 protocols were validated and approved by the Committee, and the FRC reviewed seven of the EAPs submitted for validation (Burundi flood SEAP, Mozambique drought EAP, Lebanon winter storms SEAP, Nicaragua drought EAP, Ecuador volcanic ash EAP (continued from 2022), Greece heatwave SEAP, Zambia Drought EAP).

## **2.2 Focus area 2: Health of women and girls**

### **Enhancing the programming for impactful sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) approach**

The FRC works with partner Red Cross Red Crescent Societies to improve the health of women, girls and children through long-term community-based health programming. Improving sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) remains as a key aim of the programme. The partner National Societies' focus is on sexual and reproductive health (SRH), which emphasises the curative and health care services. The FRC approach spans from working at the community to change attitudes and norms and encourage and facilitate care-seeking behaviour to improving the skills in, quality of and access to health services. Based on participatory processes of project intervention design, the programme aims to bridge gaps in SRH including antenatal, childbirth and postnatal care, comprehensive sexuality education, prevention of reproductive cancers, detecting and preventing sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), including harmful traditional practices and prevention and treatment of HIV, as per the needs identified in communities.

In 2023, the FRC supported Red Cross Red Crescent Societies to engage women, their husbands, community and religious leaders, traditional birth attendants (TBA) and community health workers to encourage attendance at antenatal care and safe delivery. For example, a cadre of community health and SRH trained volunteers supported the holistic Model Household Approach in Burundi, which promoted antenatal care and safe delivery through education and a supportive home environment. Community health volunteers in South Sudan and Burkina Faso provided SRH promotion messages through house-to-house visits, radio broadcasts, and community meetings.

Based on a community assessment of social norms in South Sudan, sessions with mothers' and fathers' groups were conducted in Sierra Leone to support better care-seeking by women and by men.

Volunteers trained in Myanmar continued the household visits to promote antenatal and postnatal care as well as provided health education to the Mothers' Clubs on maternal and child health including family planning. These home visits and health education have since contributed to a 23% increase in postnatal care visits, 27% rise in newborn breastfeeding, as well as 25% increase in exclusive breastfeeding. In addition to that, the volunteers also assisted community members to visit a health facility for SRHR services. In Afghanistan, the ARCS established Grandmother committees in its target communities. Members of these committees received comprehensive training on reproductive, maternal, and child health, covering topics such as family planning, sexually transmitted infections (STIs), antenatal care (ANC), postnatal care (PNC), breastfeeding, and newborn care. These committees serve as crucial platforms for enhancing community engagement and empowering grandmothers to play a pivotal role in promoting the health and well-being of women, newborns, and children within their communities.

Community health workers (CHW) often form the backbone of national community health systems and are the first line of skilled care providers before access to health facilities. The Burundi Red Cross trained CHWs for nutrition support centres called FARNs. The Burkina Faso programme covered general health and hygiene, and antenatal care and nutrition counselling. The Ethiopian Red Cross provided refresher training on maternal, newborn, and child health, SRHR, and psychosocial support. The Kenya Red Cross trained CHWs using the government curriculum modules focused on SRHR and SGBV. The Niger Red Cross responded to a diphtheria outbreak by training CHWs on community-based surveillance and preventative measures for diphtheria. In Somalia, Red Crescent Health Officers trained CHWs in Community-based Health and First Aid (CBHFA) and epidemic control. The FRC provided technical support to the review of the Government of South Sudan's Boma Health Initiative, which guides the work that community health workers perform in the country. The Zimbabwe Red Cross built on Disability Inclusion trainings from the previous year and trained CHWs on disability inclusion. The range of trainings reflects the variety of health problems in the community.

The FRC also participated in discussions with the IFRC, African National Societies and partner National Societies operating in Africa to improve coordination between community health workers/systems and community-based volunteers. The IFRC developed the Resilient & Empowered African Community Health (REACH) Initiative aiming to increase community health work force with two million new CHWs. The FRC has been involved in the technical support of REACH. The Somali Red Crescent was involved in drafting the Community Health Strategy in Somaliland and advocated for Community Based Surveillance to be included. This epidemic preparedness tool will assist the population, especially the most vulnerable, to react quickly to emerging outbreaks and start early response.

The National Societies of Kenya, Burkina Faso, Sierra Leone and Zimbabwe trained traditional birth attendants (TBAs) to provide improved support and referral of pregnant women to healthcare facilities. Training traditional birth attendants in Burkina Faso was particularly challenging due to security and access to villages. The Burkinabe Red Cross managed to train traditional birth attendants outside their villages, after which they returned to the villages to give services for pregnant women. TBAs were additionally trained in first aid. In 2023, TBAs facilitated 186 childbirths at health facilities, encouraging and accompanying/directing pregnant women to the few still functional facilities.

Adolescents were reached with comprehensive SRHR information, often including menstrual health management (MHM), through a variety of activities. In Zimbabwe, teachers were actively engaged in reviewing a comprehensive sexual education manual in 2023, which they will start using in schools in 2024. The Sierra Leone Red Cross distributed edutainment material sets in adolescent-friendly corners, i.e. areas set aside within Public Health Units for adolescents to access SRHR information. In Kenya, Ethiopia, Niger, Burkina Faso, Myanmar and Burundi, National Societies shared SRHR messages through schools. In Somalia, menstrual hygiene management kits were distributed alongside key health messages from the Somali Red Crescent health clinics and schools, and South Sudan and Ethiopia Red Crosses provided menstrual health information and hygiene kits through school clubs. The Niger Red Cross conducted menstrual hygiene management awareness raising in 2023, with the distribution of menstrual hygiene materials planned for 2024. In Myanmar, sessions on menstrual hygiene management were also conducted in schools, as well as provision of sanitary products, leading to improved menstrual hygiene among adolescent girls.

The Afghanistan Red Crescent developed Information, Education, and Communication (IEC) materials on health and hygiene promotion topic including MHM. They were specifically adapted to the local context, in close collaboration with the Afghan Ministry of Public Health (MoPH).

National Societies in Kenya, Niger, Afghanistan and Somalia run and provide basic health services through mobile teams and clinics. These increase access to essential health services, including perinatal care, in areas with low health care coverage. The mobile clinics in Niger decreased barriers to access SRH services in a part of the country where teenage pregnancies and fertility rates are the highest. The quality of clinical care support was also improved through the use of the Safe Delivery App, which is a clinical support tool for midwives. The mobile clinics reached communities in remote and disadvantaged areas of Niger in one health district. In Afghanistan, the National Society's mobile health teams provided primary and emergency health and immunisation services, including sexual and reproductive health and mother and child health. Both male and female medical staff were deployed.

The Red Cross Red Crescent clinical services included voluntary counselling and testing for HIV and other STIs services in Kenya, Niger and Somalia. Burundi's holistic approach to resilience – the Model Household approach – includes as one of its pillars that people know their HIV status (and thus can get connected to services). In Zimbabwe, fishing communities were identified as a high-risk group for STIs and one that is often overlooked. In these communities a specific SRHR component was included in the first aid courses.

The detection and prevention of reproductive cancers begins from an early age. In Sierra Leone, volunteers support social mobilisation for HPV vaccination campaigns. Health services outreach in Kenya, with the help of Kenya Red Cross volunteers, provides cervical cancer screening and HPV vaccines to people who otherwise find it difficult to reach such services, many of them from marginalised pastoralist groups.

#### **Advocating for the fundamental rights of women and girls to live lives free of violence and abuse**

Advocating for the fundamental rights of women and girls to live lives free of violence and abuse is a critical part of the FRC Programme. Efforts to eliminate harmful traditional practices, particularly female genital mutilation (FGM) and child, early, and forced marriages (CEFM), continue in many countries. In Ethiopia, an evidence-based social norms change approach leads communities towards public declarations against FGM and CEFM by involving key stakeholders, including men, women, adolescents, teachers, and the police. This approach facilitates open discussions on sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) and harmful traditional practices for community leaders, government office staff, and women's representatives in Afar, while also promoting social norms change to eliminate FGM in Benishangul Gumuz.

In Kenya, the gender assessment conducted in Tana River North in November 2023 helped to understand better the root causes of SGBV, contributing factors, and barriers to access services and rights for SGBV survivors. The findings have been used to readjust the activities to be implemented in 2024 but also to give more light to the gaps identified in the communities and start working on improving coordination and management of SGBV cases between health services, education, community watch groups and grassroots organisations as well as on prevention of SGBV through retention of girls in school. This coordination allowed to quickly refer two SGBV cases in December (one of them identified as a person with disabilities) to women grassroots organisations that accompanied them to the safe SGBV centre in Hola and Mombasa.

Improving coordination between Ministries and advocacy on consequences of SGBV is key to preventing and responding to SGBV. For that reason, the Kenya Red Cross supported quarterly stakeholder forums and organised technical working groups with the Department of Health, Department of Gender, and the National Council of Persons with Disabilities.

Men are consistently viewed as partners in progress towards eliminating SGBV, and their role was emphasised in participatory community assessments in the Kenya and South Sudan Red Crosses. In Kenya, men's champion groups facilitate discussions on supporting women in accessing perinatal services, family planning, and addressing social norms around SGBV. The Burundi Red Cross mobilises groups of men against SGBV as agents of change, while in Niger, engaging men, boys, and religious leaders specifically to reach men on SGBV, especially violence in the home, is a key strategy for the National Society.

Awareness-raising efforts on SGBV, child rights, FGM, and CEFM reach a diverse range of groups, including communities, staff, volunteers, teachers, administrative authorities, law enforcement agencies, and justice officials. In Sierra Leone, the National Society awareness-raising sessions focus on SGBV, the child rights act, FGM, and CEFM. The South Sudan and Burkina Faso Red Crosses train volunteers and teachers in SGBV to support information dissemination in school clubs and communities. In Burkina Faso, the volunteers and staff conduct group discussions for internally displaced people and persons with disabilities to gather their perspectives on SGBV and seek their input for project inclusion.

Establishing and understanding referral mechanisms on SGBV is crucial for Red Cross Red Crescent volunteers, health staff, chiefs, and religious leaders to ensure proper management of victims and survivors. All FRC-supported clinics in Somalia have staff trained in the clinical management of rape and referral pathways, with trained volunteers offering referral services to survivors of SGBV. The Kenya Red Cross gender assessment identified gaps in health staff SGBV referrals, which led to increased trainings and follow-up. Also, the establishment of community watch groups and improved coordination between chiefs, head teachers, child welfare officers, and NGOs led to a successful identification and provision of safe referral of SGBV survivors. South Sudan Red Cross volunteers are trained to provide basic referrals in communities and psychological first aid. The Burundi Red Cross provides assistance to SGBV survivors, such as dignity kits, medical care, and support for income-generating activities. In Myanmar, the National Society is an active member of the SGBV Working Group at the provincial level, for information sharing and case referral pathway discussions. In Afghanistan, due to its sensitivity, the SGBV topic is briefly integrated in the first aid training module.

The Burkinabe Red Cross (BRC) mapped the SGBV stakeholders in the relevant regions in 2023. Administrative, religious and customary authorities were engaged in a participatory and informative manner. The process enabled the BRC to solicit for their support and facilitate the implementation of the project.

The National Societies reach people through a variety of channels, including key community stakeholders like teachers, the police, leaders, and schools, as well as through first aid trainings and workshops. In Somalia, Burundi, South Sudan, and Burkina Faso, volunteers are trained on SGBV. Zimbabwe integrates SGBV and child protection into first aid trainings with fishing communities (an identified at-risk marginalised group), while youth advisors are trained in safeguarding, including SGBV. Radio, community theatre, and community debates are also used to address SGBV in countries like Niger and South Sudan.

### **Addressing child mortality and morbidity through community-based approaches**

The National Societies implementing the Programme have played a significant role in improving knowledge and practices related to the prevention and treatment of major causes of child mortality and morbidity. At the community level, health promotion messages focused on the major causes of child mortality (diarrhoea, pneumonia and malaria) and nutrition screening and referral in Sierra Leone, Ethiopia, Burundi, South Sudan, and Burkina Faso. In Sierra Leone trained volunteers engaged in household visits, and mobile cinema was used to educate and demonstrate health promotion and preventative actions that support child health (e.g. handwashing, mosquito net hanging, and oral rehydration solution preparation).

The FRC supports clinical services that reach children under five years of age in Somalia and Kenya (medical outreach). In Somalia, the provision of clinical services is provided for children under five through seven static clinics. Altogether 23,000 children under five were reached in 2023, divided equally between boys and girls. The total number of children screened for malnutrition was more than 35,000. The clinical services increase the trust and accountability of the National Society in the communities and Local Community Health Committees. The Committees comprise of community members and have authority to influence in practising harmful traditional practices such as FGM.

Training and supervision of health workers in the Integrated Management of Childhood Illnesses (IMCI) improved quality of care at service level in the Somali Red Crescent. In Afghanistan, the FRC-supported health project includes mother and child health (MCH) education and skills building using a community-based approach. The volunteers and Grandmother committees received training on family planning, sexually transmitted infections (STI), antenatal care (ANC), postnatal care (PNC), breastfeeding, and newborn care.

Nutrition interventions are supported in Somalia, Burundi and Kenya. The Burundi Red Cross trains staff for nutritional rehabilitation and support centres, which screen and refer the malnourished children to health facilities. The volunteers follow up that the children referred have received treatment. Somali Red Crescent clinics offer nutrition screening, treatment, and referral. Additionally, mother-led MUAC (mid-upper arm circumference), an evidence-based community screening system developed during the COVID-19 pandemic, provided early detection for malnutrition in children. Mothers learned Infant and Young Child Feeding (IYCF) practices with volunteers. The Niger Red Cross reached the population with nutrition messages via radio. The Zimbabwe Red Cross included the establishment of community nutrition gardens in community action plans.

### **Improving access to water, sanitation and hygiene as a foundation for health**

In 2023, the FRC supported the implementation of a wide range of water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) activities. The approach is based on a sustainable model in which local committees oversee and maintain the water projects. In all locations, WASH hardware was coupled with comprehensive hygiene promotion, including Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM), especially targeting women and children, to improve health through better services and changed behaviour.

An expert assessment of water facilities allowed the identification of needs and prioritisation. Based on previous assessments in Sierra Leone, the construction or rehabilitation of water points was completed in 27 locations with accessibility for persons with disabilities. New assessments of water points took place in Zimbabwe, leading to the rehabilitation of 12 water points. Water point rehabilitation will be seen in Burundi in 2024. In Ethiopia, sustainable community access to water was prioritised in the drought-prone area with the construction of a cistern.

All water points supported by the projects were associated with community water point committees. The National Societies trained the committees to monitor, service and repair water points through agreements made with communities. For example in Sierra Leone, water point committees collected funds from community members to pay local project-trained artisans to repair broken water points. In Myanmar, the National Society facilitated water safety plans in 11 villages to maintain their water systems.

Climate resilience is important in countries which already face the effects of climate change. For example, National Societies in Afghanistan, Burundi and Sierra Leone installed flood protection measures such as ditches, grassing or raised platforms to avoid inundation. The South Sudan Red Cross drilled boreholes during the peak dry season (December) to reach the deepest water level, reducing the risk of boreholes drying up. Locally made ceramic water filters were used in Myanmar to aid in the promotion of sustainable safe drinking practices. The construction of rainwater collection tanks supported households to have sufficient domestic water supply even during the dry months. The Afghanistan Red Crescent set up solar panels to operate the pump for constructed boreholes.

The construction of latrines was supported through National Societies in Somalia, Burundi, Ethiopia, Sierra Leone, Myanmar and South Sudan. This took place in a variety of ways often depending on the guidance of the government and authorities (in many countries latrine construction is allowed only by community members themselves). The South Sudan Red Cross constructed latrines for elderly persons and persons with disabilities, and artisans were trained on latrine construction. In Sierra Leone, the National Society supported communities to construct cheaper latrine slabs.

Volunteers were trained to disseminate health and hygiene information. At the school level in Afghanistan, the National Society established WASH club committees comprising students, school administrators, teachers, and school cleaners. These committees are responsible for organising health and hygiene awareness sessions for students and staff, ensuring that comprehensive hygiene education is integrated into the school environment. Additionally, the committees oversee the maintenance of school hygiene and sanitation, ensuring the regular upkeep of WASH facilities constructed within the schools. The Afghanistan Red Crescent also emphasised menstrual hygiene management by providing contextualised hygiene kits for schoolgirls.

Various participatory approaches were taken to improve sanitation and hygiene practices in communities. The Somali Red Crescent and Community Health Committees supported the government-approved Community Led Total Sanitation (CLTS). The Burundi Red Cross used the Participatory Hygiene and Sanitation Transformation (PHAST) approach. In Sierra Leone, Community Based Disaster Management Committees included improved WASH in their

Community Action Plans, including WASH infrastructure maintenance. All approaches have behaviour change and community participation at their core.

WASH infrastructure at health facilities was improved in multiple locations. In Niger, the National Society facilitated the construction of incinerators, boreholes and latrines at health facilities. The Somali Red Crescent rehabilitated latrines to make them more accessible for persons with disabilities. In Myanmar, the number of households without a nearby handwashing facility decreased from 91% to 22% during the project.

## **2.3 Focus area 3: Reinforcing the interlinkages between humanitarian and development action**

### **Enhancing safe access and delivery of aid in situations of chronic violence**

The FRC's humanitarian–development nexus approach under the Development Programme aims at supporting local Red Cross Red Crescent Societies in their efforts to carry out development activities and deliver humanitarian aid in situations of chronic violence or conflict. In 2023, the FRC continued to provide specific communication support to local Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies in the Sahel region and in East Africa in cooperation with the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) under the Safer Access Framework (SAF) partnership. SAF is an ICRC approach to gain access to affected population groups by increasing awareness and acceptance of the National Red Cross Red Crescent Society as a neutral, impartial, and independent actor among affected communities and those who control or influence access to these communities. The support was provided in practice by two SAF Communication Advisers based in the ICRC Abidjan and Addis Ababa delegations.

The SAF Communications Adviser in Addis Ababa continued the work with the Ethiopian Red Cross and South Sudan Red Cross Societies. In Ethiopia, the security situation continued to be volatile in many regions despite the end of the Tigray conflict. The Ethiopian Red Cross Society (ERCS) continued to face several conflict-related access problems and security incidents, particularly in the northern part of the country, resulting in loss of lives among ambulance service staff members. Especially the lack of understanding of the auxiliary role of the Ethiopian Red Cross was seen to hinder their ability to deliver humanitarian aid. Mass sensitisation and dissemination campaigns continued in the most critical areas to tackle the issue, but the low capacity and lack of resources in regional and local branches seriously limited the impact of these campaigns. For the National Society to strengthen its local staff and volunteer capacity in complex and volatile contexts, the senior management leadership is crucial. In Ethiopia, attention by senior management to work on SAF was considered insufficient, which will be addressed in 2024 with increased investment in understanding the links between proper communication capacities and safer access at the senior management level.

In South Sudan, both the draft Communication Policy and Communication Strategy were finalised. In the process, a thorough context analysis of the communication landscape was conducted to better understand safer access related challenges in different states experiencing diverse conflict and disaster scenarios. Extensive crisis management training for senior management and governing board members was organised in disaster and conflict affected branches in August 2023, looking at how different trends will affect South Sudan in the future, what sort of crises they might cause, and what kind of preparedness they would require from the South Sudan Red Cross. The importance of linking preparedness to communications was reinforced through a scenario exercise, in which important elements of crisis communications, and working with media during crisis and conflicts were included in the preparedness plans and practised. During the year, National Society staff members in charge of local communications were trained in digital content creation, storytelling, mobile journalism and editing capacities. Branches often rely on local volunteers in their social media management and Red Cross communication basics, and social media management capacities were reinforced in the trainings. Branding guidelines were developed and disseminated to all branches.

Other activities in East and Southern Africa included discussions with the Kenya Red Cross Society (KRCS) and its ability to provide peer support to English-speaking National Societies particularly in the field of election preparedness. In connection with the national elections in 2022, the KRCS had a key role in addressing the election tensions by conveying neutral and impartial information to the public and by providing psychosocial support by means of phone helplines. Some of these experiences were shared with the Baphalali Eswatini Red Cross Society (BERCS) where crisis communications and election preparedness work was supported by the SAF Communications Adviser. With the Adviser's support, the BERCS started preparing a Communications Strategy and Branding



Guidelines and key Red Cross messages to use in times of crisis. In Somalia, ground was prepared to engage in closer SAF communication cooperation for 2024.

In Asia, the FRC continues pursuing the objective of initiating SAF support to National Societies in critical contexts of insecurity and protracted crisis, i.e. Afghanistan and Myanmar. Together with the ICRC, both contexts have been prioritised due to the sensitive challenges in perception, acceptance, and access that the National Societies experience in relation to governmental authorities, communities, and other stakeholders. In both contexts, the auxiliary role of the National Societies is deeply challenged by various actors due to the nature of and interaction with the current authorities. In Myanmar in particular, humanitarian space continues to shrink, and access constraints for humanitarian organisations are regarded as extreme. The proposed SAF support linked to communications is thus essential for the ARCS and the MRCS to strengthen understanding of their mandate and responsibilities (both opportunities and limitations), and to gain trust of communities and stakeholders to facilitate access to those affected by the catastrophic humanitarian situations in the countries.

In Afghanistan, a scoping study was carried out between February and March 2023 by an FRC communications specialist. Due to ICRC security protocols at the time, the study had to be done remotely. The study defines the priority areas of technical capacity building and structural development for the ARCS in terms of operational communications, crisis communication, and social media management. The second half of the year was dedicated to confirming the cooperation arrangements between the FRC, the ICRC and the ARCS, and the recruitment of the FRC Communications Adviser to be deployed to support the ARCS communications department. The recruitment was finalised by the end of December 2023, with the deployment of the FRC Adviser planned for February 2024.

In Myanmar, the FRC and the ICRC started preparations for the corresponding SAF scoping study. Preparatory discussions were organised with relevant MRCS departments (Communications and Organizational Development), the study's Terms of Reference and interview questions were agreed on, and the scheduling of interviews for January 2024 was confirmed.

FRC's cooperation with the ICRC on the Safer Access Framework also entails annual lessons learned and reflection meetings. Some of the challenges identified in 2023 were related to internal resourcing and knowledge of SAF in the ICRC. There are only a few SAF experts in the ICRC, and most of the staff do not have much knowledge of SAF or understanding of and commitment to how it links to their work. The budget cuts experienced by the ICRC in late 2023 worsened the situation, as the ICRC was forced to reduce the National Society cooperation related staff in favour of core staff working with operations. The SAF partnership with the Finnish Red Cross is therefore an appreciated means of support, but the Finnish Red Cross is also having difficulties in finding or growing appropriate human resources to take over the advisory roles when people in the field change. Both parties are working in close cooperation to increase the number of SAF advisers in 2024, also in order to build new capacity in this field within the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement.

### **Continuation of basic health services with particular focus on health of women and girls**

In 2023, the FRC continued promoting, learning, and developing best ways to support a continuity of access to quality healthcare in situations of conflict. The approaches vary depending on the specific context. The aim is to especially support services that positively benefit girls and women, including those with disabilities.

In Burkina Faso, FRC support is based on a Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRH) framework programme for both peaceful and conflict-affected areas, allowing for the necessary flexibility to adapt to changing circumstances. The activities implemented included training of traditional birth attendants and providing them personal protective equipment and clean delivery kits. This has allowed the continuity of maternal care in the conflict situation.

Planning for the new flagship health and nexus programme in Myanmar took place in 2023, taking into consideration the results of the final evaluation of the previous community-based health and resilience (CBHR) programme, as well as the village assessments conducted in Q3–Q4 2023. The recommendations included the addition of Women's Club funds. The clubs can still access the regular community funds, but the Women's Club fund gives them more agency on ensuring assistance for the women and their children to access health services, either by travelling to the public health facility in the next town or seeking consultation with the nearby private health practitioners. As the conflict is not abating, mapping of referral pathways – for medical emergencies, SGBV cases, and for mobility assistive devices – is planned for the next year. Emphasis is also put on preparedness, both branch and community, which includes health training and equipping, to ensure the provision of some health services even when movement restrictions are

in place. Mobile health teams still remain an option although the recruitment of medical professionals to operate them continues to be the biggest challenge.

In Yemen, FRC support contributed to the operation of nine primary health care centres under a wider consortium programme. The planned tenth health facility did not function due to delays in procurement. A total of 102,602 people (44% male, 56% female) received consultations in 2023, significantly exceeding the initial target of 70,000 and reaching 146.5% of the goal. This increase suggests a positive trend in health-seeking behaviour. Additionally, the clinic infrastructure damaged by the conflict is being rehabilitated.

National Societies have various methods to address challenges faced in delivering health services in these contexts. In Somalia, cooperation with UNICEF and WFP increases the convenience (and thus reduces the risk) for local communities to utilise the clinic services, as they can also get the nutritional supplement at the same clinic. In Yemen, the clinics are located in safe areas near the main roads and away from military locations. To enhance safer access by the people, the facilities are built to ensure patient confidentiality and privacy, and to respect the community culture. To tackle the challenges in ensuring medicine provision at the clinics, procurement is done locally in Yemen when needed, even though it is mainly done through an agreement with the ICRC under the One Movement Logistics Pipeline.

### **Navigating the Nexus Approach in conflict-affected regions**

The need to be able to work in the humanitarian and development nexus was highly relevant for FRC programmes in conflict and violence-affected countries, such as Ethiopia, Somalia, Burkina Faso, Afghanistan, Yemen, South Sudan and Myanmar. Significant disruptions took place and access constraints were experienced, necessitating programmatic and budgetary adjustments in programmes under the MFA Programme. In Myanmar, the conflict and political situation, coupled with the international community's response, led to administrative hurdles and delays in the programme administrative processes, resulting in repeated revisions to budgets.

The events in Myanmar, Afghanistan, Somalia, and Yemen generated immense humanitarian needs, which emphasise the critical role of working through National Societies deeply rooted in the affected societies. The presence and access of the National Society, its branches, and volunteers have been key in delivering humanitarian assistance. In Somalia, for instance, foreign staff was denied access to certain areas in Puntland, but the local Red Crescent Society remained operational. Similarly, in Afghanistan, the Afghan Red Crescent operates in all provinces, enabling the continuation of activities, particularly in the health sector.

For the FRC to work with these National Societies and contexts, nexus is a manner of working that requires budget flexibility, continuous context and conflict assessments, and risk monitoring with pre-planned options. It needs to find ways for the relationship with the Partner National Society where there are concerns of its impartiality, and to constantly coordinate within the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement. Clear communication and dialogue with stakeholders, as well as dialogue and/or advocacy towards donors and authorities is often an important element, at least for them to understand the context.

During 2023, a learning module was developed for FRC International Aid staff on nexus, in which conflict sensitivity through the Better Programming Initiative of the IFRC was highlighted. It aims to ensure the principles of do no harm, do good, and inclusion while respecting that the humanitarian principles, especially of impartiality, are at the core of all programming in conflict and violence-affected contexts.

## **2.4 Focus area 4: Building strong and inclusive local actors**

### **Supporting the development of Partner National Societies**

National Society Development (NSD) is a key cornerstone of the Red Cross Red Crescent Movement for advancing localisation and locally led action. The FRC continues to support its partner National Societies in fulfilling their potential as effective and accountable local humanitarian actors, to achieve and maintain a sustainable organisation able to deliver relevant, accessible, and quality services in response to community needs. FRC's NSD support is partner-led and tailored to fit their needs, ranging from sectoral capacity enhancement support to support to organisation-wide development processes.

Despite having varied operational contexts, most of FRC's partner National Societies share similar challenges in programme management and service delivery capacities. Issues in accountability, transparency and financial management, and gaps in digital transformation, logistics and HR capacities (including both staff and volunteer management) are typical, as are issues related to operational security and risk management. Many of our local partner's NSD plans largely focus on enhancing capacities in these sectors.

While a lot of the NSD plans and NSD support by the Movement peers is geared towards capacity enhancement in the sectors mentioned above, often taking project performance as the key performance indicator, it is crucial to understand that this alone is not enough to achieve the National Society Development ideal. Organisational transformation to a strong National Society requires fundamental, deep structural changes, led by the National Societies' leadership. The current Movement discussion has started to focus more on the importance of National Society leadership's ownership and strategic focus as a key driver towards achieving more sustainable local organisations and calls for more support for this.

The recently developed frameworks e.g. for financial sustainability and branch development highlight the importance of leadership mindset and skills to lead the change. Without strong leadership and organisation, the capacity enhancement support initiatives often remain isolated attempts that have limited impact on the organisation as a whole. This is one practical challenge in FRC's support to its partners. Some of FRC's partners, such as Kenya and Burundi Red Crosses, are demonstrating significant investment in leadership capacities. However, some National Societies face operational, organisational, or leadership challenges, as seen in Afghanistan, Myanmar, Nepal, and Sierra Leone, or are recovering from organisational crises, like Zimbabwe. Although most of our partners have developed NSD strategies and plans, these challenges may hinder the full implementation of the plans due to limitations in time, resources, or capacities.

One challenge shared by many local partners is the lack of unearmarked, long-term funding available to National Society Development. Although the funding is long-term and flexible, the need for creating impact on different sectors limits the amount of unearmarked funding to capacities and core functions of the National Societies. The project and operation based approach and relatively rigid reporting and audit requirements drive towards a project and sectoral approach also in NSD, in a manner different from pooled and core funding. In many cases, progress is made in isolated sectors, but in larger National Society Development processes, such as financial sustainability, the progress is often slower than anticipated. To overcome this, the FRC tries to advocate locally led Movement-wide collaboration and pooling of resources, away from "projectivised" support at country level.

FRC's support for NSD can be, but is not limited to, enhancing the partners' capacities via ICRC's Safer Access Framework (SAF explained in chapter 3), in financial sustainability, branch and volunteer management and institutional protection, gender and inclusion (PGI).

### **Financial Sustainability**

In 2023, the FRC continued supporting two long-term partners, the Sierra Leone Red Cross Society (SLRC) and the Burundi Red Cross (BRC) and started activities with the Ethiopian Red Cross Society and the Zimbabwe Red Cross Society. Support to Baphalali Eswatini Red Cross Society (BERCS) continued outside of the MFA frame, linked to FRC's long-term partnership and funding from DG ECHO. Technical support to the partners was given by FRC's Financial Sustainability Delegate until her contract ended in mid-2023, and FRC's country and regional teams. Global coordination with different Movement actors was performed mainly by the Financial Sustainability Delegate together with FRC's NSD Advisor.

Key achievements in financial sustainability in 2023 include the timely conclusion of the asset valuation process in Sierra Leone, although the consolidated audit for accounts 2019–2022 was delayed to 2024. As results both from the asset valuation and recommendations from the audit are key steps in planning further financial management support, the progress towards the outcome of the National Society having more sound and transparent financial management in place is advancing more slowly than expected. Activities regarding supporting the internal audit function were also transferred to 2024. Despite delays, progress was made towards improved financial management, highlighted by the adoption of a new accounting system, which is easier to use and better suited for SLRC's needs, and the joint planning and budgeting process, which enhanced collaboration between the HQ and

branches. Two training sessions under the BRIDGE project improved the dissemination of policies and understanding of managerial roles and functions within the organisation.

In Burundi, the planned financial sustainability activities were completed by May 2023, with some continued support for the internal audit function. Ideas to support the National Society in resource mobilisation were discussed but, in the end, were not supported as these did not match FRC's own priority areas or are beyond FRC's funding capacity (the plans focused on construction and corporate loans). Trainings in the accounting system, Excel, and double-entry bookkeeping were successfully concluded, and core cost policy development was supported. The leadership's understanding of the Financial Sustainability concept as a strategic driver has been a positive outcome.

In Ethiopia, efforts concentrated on enhancing the financial management capacity of the Ethiopian Red Cross Society (ERCS). Ten SAP licences were purchased for zonal offices, the annual subscription fee for 2022–2024 has been paid, and SAP rollout training was provided to 44 employees from the HQ and branches. The FRC financed the access for some of the remote branches to the SAP licence and its configurations, but the needs go beyond the current funding available. There is also a limitation of database capacity and lack of computers and accessories which support SAP archiving and database management. In Zimbabwe, the focus in 2023 was on risk management and overall financial management capacity enhancement, crucial for the recovery of the Zimbabwe Red Cross Society (ZRCS) from an institutional crisis. As the ZRCS had undergone several assessments after the crisis, it was decided to postpone the financial sustainability assessment and utilise the data gathered from these previous evaluations instead. A new risk management template tool was introduced and widely adopted, and the appointment of an internal auditor's office has contributed to improved financial management and reporting quality. Commitment from the senior management to financial sustainability is strong and reflected in the ZRCS's National Society Development Plan. The challenges include the lack of consolidated financial statements, which is an important prerequisite for developing a core cost policy for the ZRCS. Additionally, supporting the leadership and management in finding the time to continue improving financial management structures in a highly demanding operational environment is also essential.

In Eswatini, MFA-funded activities ended in 2022 but remaining financial sustainability activities were continued in 2023 with other funding focusing on resource mobilisation and policy dissemination. The overall outcome includes attracting new donors and increased understanding by the senior management of financial sustainability as a strategic tool.

Overall observations show that financial sustainability is not yet recognised as a critical, multisectoral strategic concept. Committed leadership, transparency, and trust between organisations and their supporters are required for sustained impact – underlining the importance of a good, long-term, partnership management process as the basis for success. It also requires pooling of support from different partners and long-term commitment, which is problematic as many PNSs can only offer short-term project funding.

Based on the lessons learned from implementation and recommendations by the Financial Sustainability Delegate, the FRC began a process of revising its financial sustainability support approach, to be concluded in 2024. One key question is how to better link the available limited funds to other financial sustainability initiatives and technical resources in the Movement and outside for better impact.

### **Volunteer engagement and branch development**

In 2023, FRC's branch development support contributed to positive achievements across multiple countries. In Nepal, the FRC supported the participation of Nepal Red Cross Society's local and regional level in the Reducing Disaster Impact through Inclusive Preparedness and Anticipatory Action (REDI) programme in financial management, resource mobilisation and in institutional protection, gender and inclusion (PGI) mainstreaming. Early encouraging signs indicate enhanced coordination with government counterparts and other key stakeholders, benefiting both established and new branches. In Myanmar, despite complicated operational challenges, project-related trainings were conducted contributing to an increased visibility of the local Myanmar Red Cross Society (MRCS) branches in the communities as well as to increased response capacities of local MRCS branches, particularly in first aid, which is crucial during this period of conflict and instability.

In Ethiopia, FRC's support included financial management capacity building and an income-generating activity opportunities assessment for the Afar regional branch. Additionally, providing support for the branch salary and running costs has allowed it the necessary time to investigate how to find its sustainability solution. In South Sudan, support was geared towards supporting branch infrastructure, with plans for 2024 to go more into volunteer trainings. In Somalia, the FRC supported the Somali Red Crescent Society to conduct a Branch Capacity Assessment (BOCA) exercise in 11 branches.

In Sierra Leone, the FRC continued to support branch development through the BRIDGE project. The support was retargeted from six branches to one as it became apparent that spreading the support too thinly led to marginal impact. As a result, FRC support covered the Kenema branch with a focus on improvement of the branch office image and visibility, improvement of the branch income generation capacity through the renovation and modernisation of the guest lodge, and lastly towards recruitment and retention of branch members and volunteers. The prerequisite to this support was the development of concise plans, which were evaluated against multiple criteria to ensure sustainability.

In Burundi, there was a wide array of branch development activities from capacity building of volunteers (trainings on integrity, transparency and accountability, volunteering, SGBV, leadership, CEA, PSS, resource mobilisation, PGI, etc.) to supporting the improvement of income-generating initiatives. These activities had an impact especially on the Muramvya Branch, which improved its ranking dramatically, moving from the last place to second in the review of the best branches of the year 2023.

## **2.5 Advancing gender equality and inclusion across the Programme**

The programme year 2023 started by conducting a protection, gender and inclusion (PGI) baseline focusing on the MFA Programme countries. While this review provided a deeper understanding of the current situation of protection, gender and inclusion related work within FRC's projects and partner National Societies, it also highlighted PGI-related gaps calling for further attention during 2023. These gaps were addressed in the Protection, gender and inclusion road map developed during 2023. The road map focuses on PGI on three outcome levels 1) Institutional development, 2) PGI actions in programmes and projects, and 3) Advocacy and partnerships. The following provides some highlights of the work during the reporting year.

In Institutional development, the focus was on building capacity, increasing knowledge and skills, and raising awareness on protection, gender and disability inclusion in partner National Societies at management, project staff and volunteer level.

To advance disability inclusion, a three-module training package on disability inclusion was developed with Abilis Consulting and CBM Inclusion Advisory Group. Piloted in Zimbabwe and Myanmar, it was further developed based on the feedback received from trainers and participants. A Disability Inclusion Building Blocks Tool was developed to further support this work in practice. Abilis facilitated in-country based disability inclusion training sessions in Myanmar, South Sudan and Ethiopia. Hiring local organisations of persons with disabilities (OPDs) as trainers or, when necessary, local consultants with disabilities were prioritised. However, local OPDs representing different impairment groups participated in each training, providing valuable information on local contexts. The training topics included understanding the disability inclusive approach, barriers, disability inclusive project cycle management, and disability terminology. In each country, a detailed action plan with concrete steps to advance disability inclusion in the project and/or National Society was produced.

In 2022 the South Sudan Red Cross (SSRC) identified protection, gender, and inclusion (PGI) as one of its strategic priorities. Despite support from various partners for PGI, there was no assistance for disability inclusion. Responding to SSRC's request, support for disability inclusion was incorporated into FRC's annual plan for 2023. An SSRC representative expressed appreciation stating, "finally we get support to advance disability inclusion in our organisation."

The FRC partnered with Abilis, which hired two local consultants to deliver training and provide technical support on disability inclusion. The SSRC PGI team was actively involved in planning and delivering the training in Juba and Rumbek. This resulted in a comprehensive disability inclusion action plan, extending beyond FRC-supported activities to include broader National Society initiatives. SSRC's mid-management even advocated for disability inclusion

integration into programmes supported by other partners, such as the Swedish Red Cross, leading to far-reaching impact.

In addition to workshops facilitated by Abilis in three countries, other disability inclusion workshops were organised by some National Societies themselves. In Sierra Leone, a three-day disability inclusion workshop enhanced the skills of 50 participants, including BRIDGE programme staff at HQ and branch levels, the coaches and other programme leads in the Sierra Leone Red Cross Society (SLRCS) and the SLRCS governance representatives. The objective of including other programme personnel and the governance was to kick start the institutionalisation of the PGI concept in the National Society. The facilitators of the training were people with disabilities from the Sierra Leone Union of People with Disabilities and the executive secretary of the National Commission of People with Disability. Further, in Kenya, the project supported the National council for persons with disabilities to conduct a disability inclusion sensitisation forum for caregivers. This training aimed to educate caregivers on how to care for persons with disabilities, to inform persons with disabilities on their rights and responsibilities, and to empower both groups to advocate for people with disabilities within their communities. In Malawi, training on disability issues was provided to village disability committees and Area Civil Protection Committees representatives. They were equipped with skills to identify and address barriers to disability inclusion in development projects.

With regard to protection and gender mainstreaming, further work has been done on skills development in preventing and responding to sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV). Training sessions were organised in several countries focusing on harmful social norms and on prevention and response to sexual exploitation and abuse, targeting key stakeholders such as community leaders, health workers, women, men, children in schools, and school staff. These countries included Niger, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Ethiopia, and Malawi. In 2023, more attention was paid to intersectionality issues during various trainings to ensure participation of diverse marginalised groups and/or people in at-risk situations.

In Nepal, 27 local government officials (20 women and seven men), along with Nepal Red Cross Society (NRCS) staff and volunteers, were trained on SGBV. This training aimed to enhance the capacity of local government and NRCS volunteers and staff in preventing violence during emergencies.

In Burkina Faso, community dialogues on SGBV were organised to advocate for gender equality and the rights of women, girls, and persons with disabilities. These dialogues engaged community leaders, with representation from both genders. Focus group discussions were also held with internally displaced individuals and persons with disabilities to gather their experiences and perspectives on SGBV, aiming to enhance their inclusion in project interventions.

In Kenya, a Gender Assessment in Tana River focused on understanding and addressing child marriage, which is prevalent in the area. The findings were used to engage government and institutional structures in understanding and preventing SGBV. This led to a shift in the sexual and reproductive health (SRH) project from community sensitisation to holistic interventions, including a small-scale pilot of Village Savings and Loans Associations (VSLA) to increase women's financial autonomy and reduce SGBV and child marriages with a gender-transformative approach, set to be implemented in 2024.

Strengthening of institutional PGI was further fostered through various actions and reviews, including PGI Organisational Assessments (PGI OAT) in Sierra Leone, South Sudan, Somalia, and initial steps in Ethiopia, as well as support for actions identified after developing the OAT Plan of Action (Kenya).

In addition to knowledge development/learning, efforts were made to ensure that National Societies are safe and inclusive organisations. Increasing focus was paid on safeguarding measures, for instance by ensuring that PGI/Prevention of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA) policies existed and were rolled out, that there are structures in the National Society to prevent and respond to safeguarding issues, and that all members are aware of their role in the process. In Kenya, the FRC has supported a PSEA workshop to develop the PSEA Plan of Action and related actions. In Ethiopia, the FRC has supported the Ethiopian Red Cross Society (ERCS) in the development of a comprehensive PSEA policy that consulted other relevant documents at the ERCS including the code of conduct and Human Resources policy. This policy was then endorsed by the ERCS Board at the HQ level. However, the policy still needs to be rolled out at regional level. In Zimbabwe, while the National Society has a PSEA policy in place, a whistleblowing mechanism is currently being developed.

In Niger, the project increased awareness of gender equality and disability inclusion in the hiring process of National Society staff and volunteers. Efforts were made in the projects to invite volunteers with disabilities. In South Sudan, the FRC supports the National Society in understanding the barriers to gender equality and disability inclusion in a very challenging context, in steps for increasing diversity among staff and volunteers, as well as in empowering female volunteers with tailored approaches. The Kenya Red Cross Society reviewed its Disability inclusion policy and conducted an accessibility audit in the HQ and several branches to facilitate better access of persons with disabilities. In Nepal, the project revived and started empowering two existing PGI committees in district chapters.

The FRC and its partners continued mainstreaming protection, gender equality and rights of women to programme work by focusing on enhancing equal participation of women with different backgrounds in all activities. The following are some highlights from 2023:

In Kenya, 60 male champions were equipped with knowledge on SGBV prevention. These male champions spearheaded monthly forums engaging fathers in peer-to-peer discussions on eradicating practices such as female genital mutilation. In Myanmar, women's participation was reported to have increased throughout the course of the project. It was also noted that Mothers' Groups were discussing issues relevant not just for mothers, but for women in general, and hence the group is now called Women Club to make them more inclusive for all women in the community. The work on women's empowerment continues by also providing these Women Clubs separate funds for them to access and use for their or their children's health or other issues they deem relevant and all agree to. Also, by ensuring their equal and active representation in the Village Development Committees, the decision-making body where they discuss community issues, women have a say in issues concerning them.

In Afghanistan, the programme targeted schools also attended by girls, and focused on improving conditions that would not only improve the health of the pupils but promote continued attendance of girls in a context where their education is severely limited. This was done through health and first aid education, establishing first aid groups and learning spaces for both boys and girls, and with e.g. the construction of improved latrines and menstrual hygiene rooms also accessible for girls with disabilities. At community-level, women's community health volunteer groups, supported by Grandmother committees, promote SRH education to women in communities that otherwise have no access to education or health services. In Afghanistan, the ARCS community health approach offers significant potential to reach marginalised women and girls with health education, psychosocial support, and the opportunity for social interaction that contributes to their wellbeing and resilience.

Although many positive developments have taken place during 2023 both in gender and disability mainstreaming, further work is needed to ensure the full participation of women and persons with disabilities at different levels of the project. Special attention is also needed, for instance, to ensuring sex, age and disability data disaggregation, increased accessibility for persons with different kinds of impairments, and to further increasing diversity among staff and volunteers.

#### **Local and global partnerships in inclusion**

While fruitful collaboration with Abilis Consulting and CBM Inclusion Advisory Group continued, increased focus was put on identifying and encouraging collaboration with local organisations of persons with disabilities (OPDs) and other key stakeholders to foster disability inclusion.

In Ethiopia, disability inclusion training brought people together from OPDs at national and local levels, government disability experts, and persons with disabilities themselves. In these sessions, an effort was made to make sure that the OPDs had good representation, both in order to share their experiences but also to facilitate their understanding of the projects the FRC is supporting, and how they can be part of the decision-making process in the future.

In addition, for instance, in Malawi, Sierra Leone and South Sudan, National Societies are formalising agreements with local OPDs. Elsewhere, mapping exercises are ongoing to identify potential partner organisations of persons with disabilities. Working with local organisations is fundamental to achieving effective, sustainable, and culturally appropriate outcomes. It ensures that interventions are community-driven, resilient, and better suited to address the complex realities on the ground.

### 3. Achievements in Communication, Global Education and Advocacy in 2023

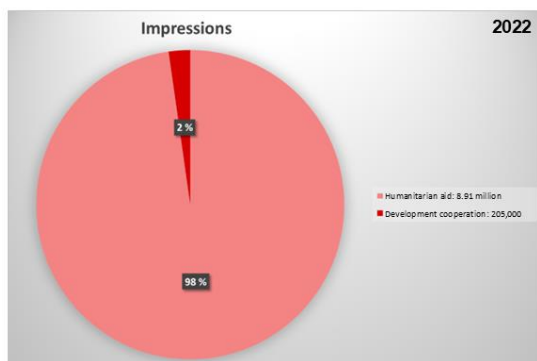
#### 3.1 Development communication

The overarching goal of the Finnish Red Cross in development communication is to enhance awareness, comprehension, and trust regarding development cooperation among the Finnish public. During 2023, the primary forms of communication materials produced included social media posts incorporating text, photos, videos, or links, as well as website and magazine articles, and press releases. These channels were utilised to cover a range of complex crises, development challenges and successes as well as the Red Cross Red Crescent's localised response to those. In addition to focus on sudden-onset crises, such as earthquakes or human-made crises like conflicts, the FRC also focused on raising awareness of protracted and forgotten crises. In many countries the development and humanitarian funding overlapped, and the same National Societies were working e.g. in community-level health promotion and service delivery. These – such as Somalia and South Sudan – were highlighted on social media and web stories. Climate change and its effects continued to be a recurring topic, as well as localisation in terms of the invaluable contributions of local volunteers in different contexts and crises.

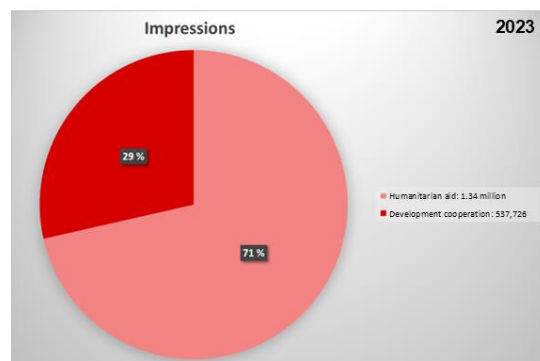
In 2023, FRC's international communications showcased different crises, including the earthquake affecting both Syria and Türkiye. Publications about this particular crisis were among last year's most popular social media posts. The public responded especially well to posts about delegates working in the countries, the material aid the FRC sent, and the work of local volunteers. The Gaza/Israel conflict also garnered a lot of attention. On social media, the FRC used the opportunity to raise the importance of International Humanitarian Law, the work of local volunteers, and the logistics ERU that was deployed to Egypt. The crisis in Ukraine and the Movement-wide response were highlighted on social media and other external communication as well.

In 2023, the FRC increased its communication about the MFA-funded development cooperation. Altogether, on social media, the posts about development cooperation garnered 537,726 impressions. This is a significant rise from the year 2022 when the corresponding posts got 205,000 impressions. The FRC covered varying topics on its social media channels, ranging from disability inclusion in Nepal and the effects of climate change in Ethiopia to the importance of proper menstrual hygiene in Sierra Leone.

Humanitarian aid vs. development cooperation - Impressions



Humanitarian aid vs. development cooperation - Impressions



*Comparison of impressions received on humanitarian aid posts vs. development cooperation posts on social media, years 2022 and 2023.*

In general, there was a steady growth in FRC's social media audience, though not as significant as in the year 2022, which can largely be attributed to the crisis in Ukraine. However, there was a slight rise in all the channels (Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn), except for X (previously Twitter), which saw a small decrease in followers (2.4%). One reason for this might be the changes in the Twitter/X leadership and the resulting changes on the platform, and the public's subsequent search for a replacement. However, there was a significant rise in impressions garnered by posts about development cooperation, due to systematic efforts to boost the visibility of this field of assistance work. The contents published on FRC's social media channels were produced by the HQ staff, field staff and delegates, partners, and the Field Communications Unit.



Regarding the FRC website, the most visited page under international aid in 2023 was the dedicated page for Emergency Response Units (ERUS). One possible explanation to this is that the FRC deployed ERUs both to Syria (earthquake) and to Egypt (Gaza/Israel conflict), and they were widely reported on by the media. The second most visited page was the dedicated page for climate change, possibly due to the related advocacy efforts.

In 2023, three Field Communication Unit (FCU) missions were successfully executed, resulting in high quality photos, videos, and stories of FRC's work. MFA funding was utilised for the missions to Eswatini and Sierra Leone. The material gathered from the missions was extensively disseminated in the Avun Maaailma and Riskien Keskellä magazines, newsletters, fundraising letters, and on the website and social media channels. It has also been shared with and further communicated by various International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement partners. The FCU deployed to Sierra Leone also conducted a capacity building workshop for the Sierra Leone Red Cross staff on ethical photography and videography techniques.

The FRC also continued its collaboration with the Finnish Foundation for Media and Development Vikes, along with other organisations, for the Development Journalism Award. In January, an award ceremony was organised in person. The winner of the award was a video documentary by Jenny Matikainen, Benjamin Suomela and Jouni Koponen. The documentary shows how China, Laos and Cambodia are building dams on the Mekong River at an accelerating pace – electricity companies are making profits but the ecosystem and local communities are struggling to survive.

Furthermore, the FRC organised a fundraising concert in December in collaboration with World Vision Finland. The theme was the global hunger crisis. Among the materials used in the concert was an interview of a staff member from the Kenya Red Cross that was filmed by the FCU team during their visit to Kenya in the summer of 2022.

### **3.2 Advocacy**

In 2023, the Finnish Red Cross engaged in advocacy in Finland mainly with regard to general development and humanitarian policy and to climate change policies. Finland held parliamentary elections in the spring of 2023, and the FRC advocated generally to highlight the importance of development cooperation, humanitarian assistance and climate action in its key messages to political parties. After the elections the FRC provided a key message paper on these to the government coalition and government programme negotiators. It has additionally provided views on and contributions to the budgetary processes as well as the messages of the Development Policy and Human Rights Committees, of which it is a member, to transmit its views to the preparations of the policy outlines of the new government.

In 2023, the FRC continued the significant progress that had started the previous year in advocating for the recognition of the humanitarian impacts of climate change, bringing forth the importance of practices of early warning early action (EWEA) and anticipatory action (AA). The FRC engaged in policy dialogue, networking, and advocacy in the Finnish context and contributed to Red Cross EU Office's and IFRC's global advocacy. FRC's position in the Finnish climate policy scene was strengthened through cooperation with Finnish humanitarian CSOs, Fingo, the Ministry for Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of the Environment. The FRC organised a high-level seminar on the topic in Helsinki in May 2023 and participated in national stakeholder consultations on Finland's COP28 preparations. For the first time, the FRC was granted an overflow badge by the Finnish government to attend COP28. The FRC organised, in collaboration with the Finnish Meteorological Institute (FMI) and the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, an event at the Finland pavilion at COP28 in Doha: Saving lives through people-centred early warning systems; Good practices from multi-stakeholder collaboration.

The FRC highlighted the importance and usefulness of the humanitarian perspective and expertise in the set-up of the Loss and Damage Fund, which was of high importance in Finland as it was co-chairing the Transitional Committee preparing the establishment of the Fund for COP28. Despite an originally a sceptical view about the relevance of a new fund, Finland ended up supporting the establishment of the L&D Fund and pledging finance to it among some of the first member states.

The FRC has contributed to the advocacy of the Red Cross EU office (RCEU), for instance with regard to the Commission Communication on Climate Risk. Further examples of FRC's active advocacy include supporting the development of the RCEU climate advocacy strategy and FRC's strong role in supporting the IFRC in the Early

Warnings for all (EW4A) Initiative. The FRC also contributed to the development of the IFRC roadmap for strengthening the efficiency of its Humanitarian Diplomacy as a network.

The link of advocacy in Finland and in the global processes with the regional and national policy dialogues is a clear strength. The FRC co-organised, actively took part in and supported the participation of its partners in various Dialogue Platforms on Anticipatory Humanitarian Action at national, regional and global levels in 2023. The platforms are excellent forums for learning and experience sharing, identifying opportunities for collaboration and scaling up, and more importantly, advocating for national policies and frameworks. They have participation from governments, hydromet agencies, international and national agencies working in anticipatory action, donors and the IFRC. A lot of the practical solutions and guidance is developed and steered through the dialogues and Technical Working Group work.

The FRC co-organised the 7th Regional Asia Pacific Dialogue Platform on Anticipatory Humanitarian Action in Nepal with the IFRC, the RCRC Climate Centre, FAO, WFP and the Start Network. The FRC remains a core member of the Dialogue Platform core committee in the region. The selection of Nepal as the location of the regional event reflects the developments in Anticipatory Action (AA) in the country – supported by the FRC.

The FRC also continued to support Nepal Red Cross Society's participation at national and Asia Pacific regional dialogue platforms and to co-facilitate the Philippines national Dialogue Platform with WFP. The FRC also supported the Philippine Red Cross (PRC) to engage in the national and regional Technical Working Groups (TWG) and to facilitate the national Dialogue Platform on AA with WFP. This led to a climate and nature-based solution focused platform, bringing a more risk-informed approach, rather than a focus on the tools for climate-smart disaster preparedness itself.

The FRC presented the East Africa EWEA project in the 6th Africa Pacific Dialogue Platform on Anticipatory Action and supported the participation of the Zimbabwe Red Cross in the event. The FRC also participated in the 11th Global Dialogue Platform on Anticipatory Humanitarian Action and continued to contribute to the IFRC technical and coordination working groups globally and regionally.

An example of FRC support to national advocacy is the Philippines. In 2023, the FRC supported the PRC to focus on national level coordination and its role as a Sub-TWG lead for Early Actions, such as shelter strengthening, relocation of small to medium enterprises or livestock evacuation. The FRC supports the PRC to evaluate Early Actions with stakeholders at the national and community levels and to feed findings into the regional Sub-TWG and national AA Technical Working Group.

Overall, the FRC maintains a strong role in the Technical Working Group on Anticipatory Humanitarian Action of the Asia Pacific region, which is co-led by the IFRC and FAO. In 2023, the FRC supported the development of the 2023–2027 triggers roadmap as well as training and guidance on the use of seasonal and sub-seasonal forecasts for AA and DRM decision-making in the region. The FRC has also contributed considerably to policy development on shock responsive social protection (SRSP) in the Asia Pacific region as part of a DG ECHO funded 'scaling up SRSP to proactively manage risks before, during and after a disaster in ASEAN'. The FRC co-hosted a session on how to connect AA and SRSP. The FRC also supported the AA-SRSP Sub-TWG to continue with the development of the concept, and developed guidance for targeting beneficiaries for SRSP in Nepal under another DG ECHO project. With the DG ECHO funding, FRC co-designed and led a 'donor round-table' event in Bangkok in December 2023 to co-design the plan for AA-SRSP evidence and learning. FRC also contributed to an FAO-led event on sub-seasonal time scales and AA in SRSP. The combination of these events resulted in collaboration of usually siloed activities in the region for hydromet agencies and the end users, such as various ministries. The involvement of FRC into these activities outside of the MFA frame, showed impact of the technical capacities of FRC beyond the programme and served as great multi-stakeholder cooperation experience, beneficial to FRC's AA approach globally.

The Finnish Meteorological Institute and the FRC have continued to build their partnership and plan to harness the partnership development process to support the advancement of climate and forecast data use in the humanitarian and development sectors, reducing the impacts of disasters and climate on people in the most vulnerable situations.

### 3.3 Global education

The year 2023 was successful for the FRC global education programme, in more than one way. The collaboration between the FRC global education programme and Science Centre Heureka's Facing Disaster exhibition spanned the entire year. The exhibition, which opened on 20 November 2021, garnered great attention. Throughout 2023, a total of 340,068 people visited the exhibition. The exhibition was closed after the 2023 Christmas/New Year holidays. All in all, since 2021, Facing Disasters was visited by a total of 634,645 people, which is a very respectable figure.

As part of the collaborative efforts, the FRC issued a third special edition of its annual Risk Zones publication, which served as one element of the Facing Disasters exhibition. The 2023 edition, titled 'After', is dedicated to study what happens when a disaster strikes. This edition followed the 2021 issue titled 'Before' and 2022 edition titled 'During'. The 2023 third edition completes the explanation of the Red Cross Red Crescent cycle of response and development supporting at-risk communities.

In 2022, a plain language version was produced of the Risk Zones global education teaching material package. Plain Finnish is the fourth Risk Zones language, with Finnish, Swedish and English as the other three. Recent research indicates that approximately ten per cent of Finland's population benefit from receiving information in plain Finnish.

The key word for developing the teaching material further in 2023 was 'accessibility'. An accessibility consultancy was assigned to go through the Risk Zones material and suggest action improving the accessibility for learners with various challenges. The FRC hired an intern to utilise the suggestions given by the consultancy and change the accessibility of the material to the extent possible.

The activities dedicated to further and continuously develop the Risk Zones package reflect the dedication to inclusivity and effective communication, with efforts to provide accessible information and resources in multiple languages, including plain Finnish. Planning for the next stage of improving the learning material package was also finalised with a decision to focus 2024 on producing a special version of the package for a pre-school audience.

Lower secondary school students are the primary target audience for the Risk Zones teaching material. However, teachers play a critical role as gatekeepers and are thus targeted as a key group for dissemination. In collaboration with Fingo global education cooperation, the FRC actively engages with universities to reach future teachers, providing them with insights into Risk Zones and guidance on utilising the teaching package. By the end of 2023, Risk Zones had well over 5,000 teachers and teachers-to-be as registered users of the material. The FRC also visits municipal teachers' in-service training events, enabling access to the material and generating interest among active teachers.

The usefulness of the teaching package is evident, as teachers who have familiarised themselves with it find it extremely useful. The average time spent by visitors on the website dedicated to the package exceeds ten minutes. Furthermore, the bounce rate, indicating the percentage of people who leave the site immediately after visiting, is exceptionally low at only 10%.

Another integral component of the FRC global education programme is delivering lectures and presentations on various development-related topics. During 2023, a total of some 40 presentations were given to a variety of audiences. These lectures and presentations reached more than 2,000 individuals, ranging from school children and university students to expert audiences.

## 4. Finance and administration

### 4.1 Finance

In 2023 there were no major changes in the financial processes of FRC International Aid. All projects within the Programme were budgeted in cooperation with the partners, and actual costs were regularly followed by field staff. The needs for budget revisions were systematically assessed, and revisions were initiated as needed: the Programme is managed as one entity, and budget revisions enabled the FRC to use the Programme budget optimally. The Regional Finance and Administration Delegates (RFAD) ensure the accuracy of financial data from FRC's partners and

adherence to FRC policies and practices, and also play a crucial role in risk management and compliance. They also provide support to partner organisations and possess knowledge of local conditions.

The original budget of the Programme was EUR 8,273,613, of which 75% MFA funding and 25% FRC's own funding. During the year, the FRC made two budget reallocation requests, and the total budget was reduced by EUR -92,222. The biggest reductions in allocations were made in country programmes in Asia: Myanmar (EUR -192,222) and Nepal (EUR -126,667), from where budget allocations were transferred to Africa, especially to Somalia (EUR 265,333), and to multi-country programmes (EUR 110,870).

The actual total cost of the Programme amounted to EUR 7,469,255, which is EUR -804,358 (10%) below the original budget and EUR -712,136 (9%) below the revised budget. The biggest gaps are attributable to Niger, where the actual expenditure is EUR -353,487 lower than the revised budget, and Yemen, where actual expenditure is EUR -244,444 lower than the revised budget. Both projects were undertaken in consortium with a European Red Cross Society in the lead, and the differences are due to the leads having challenges in compiling all costs and producing financial reports on time. Therefore, the FRC could not book these costs in the 2023 accounting. Both reports were eventually received, and corrective measures are put in place to ensure a timely delivery of consolidated reports from consortium leads. Other deviations are less significant in total euros and related to certain activities or procurements being delayed and moved to the following year, some activities – such as the renovation of an MHM friendly room in Ethiopia – being funded by regional authorities, or the previously mentioned delays in transfer of funds to Myanmar. HR costs were generally higher than planned due to several changes in the HR resourcing during the year, the addition of certain technical positions, and the explained increase in the focus for field staff during 2023.

Ten per cent of the total Programme cost is administration cost: it covers FRC Headquarters cost not directly allocated to the Programme. The FRC work time recording system shows 15,657 working hours of such work in 2023. The programme support costs in below table were lower than budgeted due to less HR costs allocated as direct costs to the Programme.

**Table 1 MFA development framework expenditure in 2023 (EUR)**

Costs	Original Budget 2023	Actual 2023
A. Programme costs	5 956 407	4 990 460
B. Programme support	126 500	63 941
C. Delegates	1 205 345	1 552 070
D. Communication and advocacy	158 000	115 858
E. Administration	827 361	746 925
<b>TOTAL COSTS</b>	<b>8 273 613</b>	<b>7 469 255</b>
<b>FUNDING</b>	<b>Per cent</b>	<b>EUR</b>
Government (MFA) funding	83 %	6 200 000
FRC funding	17 %	1 268 798
Interest income	0 %	457
<b>TOTAL FUNDING</b>	<b>100 %</b>	<b>7 469 255</b>

## 4.2 Staffing for the Programme

In 2023, the FRC continued to employ an adaptive, inclusive and localised approach to its staffing for the Programme, a continuation from 2022 and in line with FRC's Strategic framework for international aid.

The majority of the field positions comply with the standardised structure of the FRC, including Heads of Regions, overseeing their respective teams programmatically, strategically and from the HR perspective. The teams consist of a Country Manager, Project Managers, Regional Finance and Administration Delegates (RFAD) and Regional Advisers. In addition, the FRC in 2023 again increased its local recruitments, including e.g. new finance officers in Sierra Leone and Myanmar.

While not local recruitments, the FRC continued to also have more expatriate staff from the regions, especially in Africa, some with background from their own National Societies or working with, for example, the IFRC in their own countries or regions. This adds relevant technical and project management skills from peer societies in the region as well as more diversity and cultural sensitivity to the FRC teams in the field.

This approach involved ensuring that technical and programmatic support was located as close as possible to the partners implementing projects on the ground. In terms of Country Managers and programmatic staff, this aims to move ownership of the FRC-supported programmes, operations and partnerships to the field level, i.e. countries. Country Managers also oversee the partnership and National Society Development files.

Both programmatic and financial staff, including locally hired, maintain accountability and compliance and increase quality of programming with structured and best-placed quality processes and support. Especially the local Finance Officers played an important role in supporting the RFADs in their work by both taking off some pressure from voucher verification, supporting with report verification and communication with the host National Societies, and bringing additional local knowledge helpful for both finance and administration support to the partners as well as risk management and oversight.

At the same time, technical talent was attracted from as wide a market as possible while still of course emphasising relevant contextual experience and e.g. Red Cross Red Crescent knowledge. The talent for the field staff was yielded through wide international recruitment both from the Red Cross Red Crescent Movement and other organisations, internal recruitments and local/national recruitments. Some key global technical advisers were deployed to the field in 2023, including in Early Warning Early Action, Safer Access Framework and Financial Sustainability.

This larger field structure is reflected in a relatively large HR share in the Programme costs. The share of field staff, both expatriates and locally hired, attributed to 26% of the Programme's direct costs.

In addition to field staff, some key technical positions at the FRC HQ were partly covered directly from the Programme, including Senior Specialist on Climate Change and Disaster Risk Management, who managed and supported the EWEA flagship programming and partnerships globally, including with the Finnish Meteorological Institute and Red Cross Climate Centre. In addition, the key communications staff directly working for the Programme were supported by the Programme as before. Other support functions of the HQ were covered, as usual, from the administration fee.