**MEKONG**

2023 IFRC network multi-country plan

**Funding Requirement** CHF 4.1M

**Appeal number** MAA51001

**In support of the Cambodia, Laos, Thailand, and Viet Nam National Societies**

- **14,926** National Society branches
- **28,120** National Society staff
- **446,928** National Society volunteers

**People to be reached**

- **11,000** Climate and environment
- **531,000** Disasters and crises
- **162,000** Health and wellbeing
- **7,000** Migration and displacement
- **5,000** Values, power and inclusion

**IFRC network multiyear focus**

**Longer term needs**
- disaster risk management
- climate change adaptation

**Capacity development**
- resource mobilization
- planning, monitoring evaluation and reporting
- volunteering

**Population**

- Cambodia: 16.9M
- Lao People's Democratic Republic: 7.4M
- Thailand: 70M
- Viet Nam: 98.2M

IFRC Country Cluster Delegation for Cambodia, Laos, Thailand, and Vietnam, Bangkok
This document details IFRC network-wide figures and actions in areas agreed with the country National Society.

For additional information, see last page of this plan. * National Societies which have contributed only multilaterally through the IFRC in the past two years.

**Total 4.1M CHF**

**Funding requirements**

- **4.1M CHF**
  - Through the IFRC

**Participating National Societies**

- American Red Cross*
- Finnish Red Cross
- Japanese Red Cross Society*
- Swiss Red Cross*
- Korean Red Cross*
- The Thai Red Cross Society
- Italian Red Cross
- German Red Cross
- Canadian Red Cross

**IFRC Breakdown**

- **Longer term needs**
  - **469,000 CHF**
    - Climate and environment
  - **556,000 CHF**
    - Disasters and crises
  - **1.3M CHF**
    - Health and wellbeing
  - **106,000 CHF**
    - Migration and displacement
  - **346,000 CHF**
    - Values, power and inclusion
  - **1.3M CHF**
    - Enabling local actors

**Hazards**

- Cyclones/typhoons
- Floods
- Heatwaves
- Drought

**Funding requirements**

- **Total 4.1M CHF**

**Through the IFRC**

- **4.1M CHF**

**Longer term needs**

- **469,000 CHF**
  - Climate and environment
- **556,000 CHF**
  - Disasters and crises
- **1.3M CHF**
  - Health and wellbeing
- **106,000 CHF**
  - Migration and displacement
- **346,000 CHF**
  - Values, power and inclusion
- **1.3M CHF**
  - Enabling local actors
Cambodian Red Cross Society

The Cambodian Red Cross Society has served the most vulnerable communities in the Kingdom of Cambodia (Cambodia) since 1955. It is the primary national humanitarian organization in the country and has a privileged position in coordination mechanisms for disaster management and health service provision at all levels of governance. Established by Royal Decree, the National Society plays a key role in Cambodia’s national disaster management system and enjoys a permanent seat on committees for disaster management at national, provincial, district and commune levels. It has 25 provincial branches and 203 district sub-branches across Cambodia, and its permanent presence and well-established local networks are a key strength.

The Cambodian Red Cross Society’s humanitarian services are founded on three programmatic and operational pillars:

- Disaster management
- Health and care in communities
- Promoting the Fundamental Principles and humanitarian values of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement

These cover both response and developmental approaches relating to community-based risk reduction, community-based health and first aid, disaster preparedness, and youth and volunteer development. Overall, the National Society has 364 staff and more than 40,000 volunteers across 1,874 branches.

Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the National Society has supported authorities responding to the crisis with risk communication and social mobilization. It also mobilized staff, volunteers, youth volunteers and communities to take immediate action to prevent COVID-19 and promote epidemic control measures.

Lao Red Cross

The Lao Red Cross was established in 1955 as an auxiliary to the Government of the Lao People’s Democratic Republic (Laos) in rendering humanitarian services in the country. Through its core programmes and services, it responds to the needs of the most vulnerable people in Laos. In 2017, the National Assembly of Laos passed the Red Cross Law, mandating the National Society to:

- Provide primary relief assistance and first aid
- Encourage blood donations and supply blood to survivors
- Promote basic healthcare
- Carry out emergency rescue operations
- Mobilize resources
- Train volunteers to provide humanitarian assistance

The Lao Red Cross is a member of the National Disaster Prevention and Control Committee and communicates directly with the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare and the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment. Its branches are members of provincial and district disaster prevention and control committees. Overall, the National Society has 589 staff and 885 volunteers across 18 branches.

The National Society in Laos has been actively involved in raising awareness and preventing the spread of COVID-19. It trained nearly 300 staff and volunteers in epidemic control and provides volunteer group insurance to 400 volunteers who support the COVID-19 operation.

Thai Red Cross Society

The Thai Red Cross Society is the primary humanitarian organization in Thailand. Founded in 1893, it became a member of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) in 1921. Today, it is a national charitable organization which carries out humanitarian activities in keeping with the Fundamental Principles of the Movement. The National Society’s work focuses on four key areas:

- Medical and health care services
- Disaster preparedness and response
- Blood transfusion services
- Social welfare and quality of life promotion

The Thai Red Cross Society has more than 11,000 staff and at least 19,000 volunteers across 341 branches. It is designated as a primary responder under Thailand’s disaster management system, with its role and functions included in the national disaster risk management plan. The National Society’s Relief and Community Health Bureau leads on disaster management and health programming, in coordination with Thailand’s Department of Disaster Prevention and Mitigation and Ministry of Public Health. The National Society provides knowledge, technical skills, and training, and has an established disaster operations centre which can be used as a source of information and coordination. It also has a network of health stations throughout the country.
The National Society in Thailand is a major humanitarian organization in the country and responds well in the face of both natural disasters and pandemics. Its response to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has proven it to be a key player and partner of choice in Thailand, because of the way it has coordinated and collaborated with governmental and non-governmental agencies. This allowed it to mobilize the equivalent of CHF 1 million to provide relief assistance to two million people and to provide personal protective equipment and a flagship vaccination programme for Thai citizens and migrant workers in the country.

Over recent years, the IFRC and the National Society in Thailand have used a mobile app called PhonPhai to facilitate their humanitarian relief efforts. The app was developed with the financial support of the United States Agency for International Development’s (USAID’s) Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance. Using the app, the National Society ordered and processed relief kits in collaboration with 19 government disaster response agencies, including the Department of Disaster Prevention and Mitigation, the Ministry of Public Health and the Department of Public Works. It also coordinated with frontline responders and community members to deliver the kits to vulnerable households. Healthcare volunteers in rural communities are also using PhonPhai to support vulnerable people in quarantine at home by conducting primary health screenings. Volunteers can use PhonPhai to order relief kits, which are then delivered directly to households.

Viet Nam Red Cross Society

The Viet Nam Red Cross Society is one of the leading humanitarian actors in Vietnam, with more than four million members and a network of branches in all 63 provinces and major cities, and at the district and commune levels. Its mission, principles and goal are:

- To be a social humanitarian organization that connects and encourages Vietnamese people at home and overseas to carry out humanitarian activities without discrimination of class, ethnicity, religion, or sex
- To promote humanity, peace, and friendship, with a view to building a powerful Vietnam with wealthy people, a strong nation and an equitable, democratic and civilized society that provides for a good life with freedom, well-being, and conditions for comprehensive development

The National Society in Vietnam has more than 16,000 staff and at least 338,000 volunteers across nearly 13,000 branches, with strong support from the Government at all levels. In 2008, a Law on Red Cross Activities) was approved, defining the National Society’s seven core areas of activity:

- Emergency relief and humanitarian aid
- Health care
- First aid
- Donation of blood, tissues, organs and bodies
- Tracing relatives missing in wars, natural disasters and other disasters
- Disseminating humanitarian values
- Participating in disaster preparedness and response

The law puts the National Society in a unique position to deploy its staff and volunteers to disaster zones, to help people, to access government funds and raise funds from the public for disaster risk management.

Over the last two years, changes to government policies around international aid and external funding have had a significant impact on the process and progress of externally funded projects. Any external funding support to the National Society must be submitted for a technical opinion and approval, and this can take several months or more. This challenge is faced by all partners of the Vietnam Red Cross Society and is significantly delaying project implementation.

IFRC NETWORK ACTION IN 2023

Joint situational analysis

All four Mekong countries in this plan – Cambodia, Laos, Thailand and Vietnam – score differently on the Human Development Index (Vietnam 0.70, Thailand 0.77, Lao 0.61 and Cambodia 0.59). Despite this, they share common challenges and emerging risks such as rapid urbanization, climate change and environmental pressures, along with recurring disasters, health risks, rising inequalities, migration, gender discrimination and violence, and the ongoing effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.
Cambodia

Having sustained high levels of economic growth over the last two decades, Cambodia is on the path to becoming a higher middle-income status country by 2030. However, high levels of inequality and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on local economies are hampering growth. This is particularly true for the most vulnerable, marginalized rural populations, who were hit significantly harder by the pandemic’s effects on employment, household wages and non-wage incomes than macro-economic trends would suggest (UNICEF, 2021). At the 2021 United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, Cambodia remained categorized as a least developed country.

According to the Asian Development Bank, 14.5 per cent of the population across Cambodia was undernourished in 2017–2019. Stunting among children aged under five is 32.4 per cent and wasting among the same group is 9.7 per cent. Maternal mortality had reached 160 per 100,000 live births in 2017, and the mortality rate for children aged under five was 27 per 1,000 live births in 2019. Neonatal mortality stands at the rate of 15 per 1,000 live births. As of 2017, only 25.8 per cent of the population used safely managed to drink water services, with considerable differences between urban (56.6 per cent) and rural (16.7 per cent) populations.

Cambodia remains one of the world’s more disaster-prone countries, particularly due to seasonal flooding and droughts. Over the last 10 years, a succession of droughts and floods have resulted in significant loss of life and economic loss. Cambodia is a less developed, agrarian country, where more than 75 per cent of people live in rural areas, and there is a strong dependency on climate-sensitive sectors such as agriculture, land, water resources, forestry and fisheries. Together, these factors make Cambodia particularly vulnerable to the effects of climate change, and they are further exacerbated by weak adaptive capacity, poor infrastructure and limited institutional capacity. The Government recognizes floods and droughts as the main driver of poverty in the country, and rural households, particularly women in rural settings, are especially vulnerable to climate change and have more difficulty adapting to it.

Cambodia is in general highly exposed to water-related diseases, including diarrhoeal diseases, typhoid fever, leptospirosis, melioidosis, viral hepatitis, and schistosomiasis. The impact of climate change in Cambodia may also be increasing the risk of water- and vector-borne diseases, and the likelihood of epidemics. Drought, rains and particularly floods are linked with an increased risk of outbreaks of diseases including diarrhoea, cholera, dengue, malaria and respiratory tract infections. These outbreaks put additional strain on local health services in disasters. High temperatures also represent an environmental driver for vector-borne diseases such as dengue.

Laos

Like its neighbours, Laos has made impressive development gains in recent years, halving poverty and reducing malnutrition. The challenge now is to enable all Lao people to benefit from the country’s development, ensuring that the results of high economic growth, which have averaged more than 4.9 per cent for the past five years, are evenly distributed and translated into inclusive and sustainable human development.

Laos was ranked 137 out of 189 countries in the 2020 Human Development Report. Communities across the country are affected by frequent small-scale, recurrent disasters which have significant socio-economic impacts, making poor populations increasingly vulnerable and undermining their existing coping mechanisms. Laos also continues to deal with unexploded ordnance and bombs in many areas.

In recent months, Laos has seen high inflation at a rate at 23.6 per cent. Its currency depreciation against other currencies is making life harder for many, particularly the most vulnerable people who have less access to alternative livelihood options and who are dependent on tourism and other services.

Thailand

Over the last four decades, Thailand has made remarkable progress in social and economic development, moving from a low-income country to an upper-income country in less than a generation. It has the second-largest economy in Southeast Asia, driven by manufacturing, agriculture and tourism. While poverty has declined over the last three decades (from 65 per cent in 1988 to nearly 10 per cent in 2018), income inequality has increased.

Thailand remains at risk of major disasters such as floods, tropical cyclones and droughts, as well as other risks related to health issues, which can cause economic loss as well as costing lives. Major health risks include pandemics, non-communicable diseases, infectious diseases such as malaria and tuberculosis, and traffic accidents.
Vietnam

Vietnam has one of the fastest-growing economies of the 21st century. Economic and political reforms launched in 1986 have spurred rapid economic growth and development, transforming Vietnam from one of the world's poorest nations to a lower-middle-income country. It has made significant progress towards its sustainable development goals, with poverty rates dropping from nearly 10 per cent in 2015 to less than seven per cent in 2017, and a primary net enrolment rate of 99 per cent. Vietnam is also one of the countries most affected by climate change and is at continuous risk of disasters caused by natural hazards such as floods, tropical cyclones, landslides, droughts and heatwaves.

Strategic priorities

Climate and environment

The four Mekong countries face increasing levels of risk in both rural and urban areas, due to massive urbanization, climate change and the growth of megacities in low-lying flood plains.

Cambodia is heavily impacted by floods and droughts. Large sections of the country are prone to flooding, particularly the Mekong River Basin and the Tonle Sap Lake and River. The Serei Sophon and Sangker Rivers in northwestern Cambodia have also seen considerable floods in recent years. Historically, flooding affects an estimated 90,000 people each year in the country, and annual urban damage is estimated at US$105 million. A combination of climate change and rapid, unsound economic development is expected to push these figures higher. Projected climate change trends indicate more severe floods and droughts, which are expected to affect Cambodia’s GDP by nearly 10 per cent by 2050. By the 2040s, approximately four million additional people could be exposed to extreme river flooding.

According to the ND-GAIN Index 2019, Cambodia was the sixth most vulnerable country in Asia to the impact of climate change.

The depletion of biodiversity, the degradation of inland water resources and waste management continue to have a significant impact on human activity in Cambodia. Deforestation in particular has serious effects and is associated with flooding and erosion in the Mekong River Basin, endangering livelihoods and reducing water availability in the dry season.

Laos ranks as the world’s 52nd most vulnerable country to climate change (Germanwatch e.V. Global Climate Risk Index 2021) due to its dependence on climate-sensitive natural resources and its low adaptive capacity. It is susceptible to drought, floods and typhoons.

In November 2020, nearly five million people were affected when Typhoon Ulysses/Vamco hit the Philippines and Vietnam. In Cambodia, Laos, Thailand and Vietnam, 289 people died in the floods caused by Tropical Storm Linfa in October 2020. COVID-19 is also adding to Southeast Asia’s vulnerabilities to climate change and, according to an analysis released by the IFRC and the Red Cross Red Crescent Climate Centre in September 2021, five of the region’s countries are among those most affected by severe climate-related events which overlapped with the pandemic.

In Thailand, the effects of climate change include severe storms, heatwaves, droughts and floods, which have hindered the economy and caused significant loss of life. The economic, cultural and environmental impacts of climate-related damage to agriculture, coastal tourism and the capital city are expected to be enormous. In the north of the country, choking fires have seen air quality in cities deteriorate to critical levels, leaving millions of people with health issues. In March 2021, Thailand’s National Climate Change Committee approved a draft of Thailand’s first Climate Change Act for submission to the cabinet.

Vietnam is among the countries most affected by climate change globally. It faces negative consequences from rising sea levels, salinity intrusion and other hydrological problems like floods, river mouth evolution and sedimentation. It is also seeing more frequent natural hazards such as cold waves and storm surges. Issues like land subsidence from excessive groundwater extraction further exacerbate the effects of climate change, particularly around the Mekong Delta. Vietnam has introduced legislation towards its greenhouse gas reduction goals in line with the Paris Agreement, including a draft law on environmental protection and a lower-level decree from the Environment Ministry. Together, they aim at preparing Vietnam to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.
Main actions and areas of support

The IFRC, the National Societies and the Red Cross Red Crescent Climate Centre are collaborating on forecast-based financing, developing Early Action Protocols (EAPs) in response to heatwaves and other hazards such as floods and typhoons in Vietnam. In both Cambodia and Vietnam, they will focus on anticipatory action to these hazards. The Finnish Red Cross will work with the Cambodian Red Cross Society and government agencies to enhance coordination, information sharing and weather forecasting, aiming to save lives by improving early warning and action. The American Red Cross will continue to work with the Vietnam Red Cross Society to develop and test EAPs for floods and typhoons, and the IFRC will provide technical and management support to the Vietnam Red Cross Society in implementing EAPs for heatwaves through readiness and prepositioning supplies.

The IFRC will continue to advocate for all four National Societies and support them to scale up climate action and climate-smart interventions. These will include nature-based solutions and rolling out the Climate and Environment Charter for humanitarian organisations. A major focus will be put on promoting an understanding of the charter and translating climate action commitments into actions through advocacy, awareness, education, risk assessment and community-based interventions and practices.

The IFRC will also provide technical support to all National Societies in conducting risk awareness activities to analyze vulnerability and exposure to climate shocks. This will include forecast-based financing to anticipate climate impacts and identify suitable early actions.

The Vietnam Red Cross Society is part of the IFRC Global Climate Resilience Programme, which aims to foster an unprecedented scale-up in locally-led climate-smart disaster risk reduction and adaptation efforts to prevent and reduce climate-related disaster impacts, and build community-level climate resilience. The programme aims to support 500 million people in 100 of the most climate-vulnerable countries, focusing on the least supported and marginalized communities. This holistic, multi-year programmatic approach consists of four operational pillars: (1) scaling up climate-smart disaster risk reduction, anticipatory action and preparedness; (2) reducing the public health impacts of climate change; (3) addressing climate displacement; and (4) enabling climate-resilient livelihoods and ecosystem services.

In Thailand, the Enhancing Disaster Risk Reduction Capacity in Thailand initiative will integrate links between community-based disaster risk reduction and climate-smart action. This initiative receives financial support from USAID’s Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance through the IFRC.

With support from the American Red Cross, the Vietnam Red Cross Society is implementing a two-year Greening Disaster Risk Reduction initiative. This started in July 2021 and is financially supported by USAID. The IFRC will continue to coordinate and work with the American Red Cross to ensure sound support in both technical areas and project management.

Disasters and crises

For real-time information on emergencies, see IFRC GO

Cambodia
Laos
Thailand
Vietnam

Droughts, floods, tropical storms and forest fires occur frequently in all four countries. In 2017, disasters in Southeast Asia caused 61 per cent of new displacements. It is estimated that in developing countries, the agricultural sector absorbs an average of 22 per cent of the damage from natural disasters. Vulnerabilities across international borders underline the importance of sub-regional cooperation, and difficulties remain in getting disaster risk reduction recognized, prioritized, and coordinated. This is particularly true at a local level, where capacities are lacking within both National Societies and their government counterparts.

Cambodia’s exposure to natural hazards is relatively high, with droughts, floods and typhoons devastating crops and causing loss of life. Typhoons and tropical storms in the Pacific can lead to heavy flooding in Cambodia, and the wet season can cause flooding of the Mekong River. The safety and livelihoods of vulnerable communities across Cambodia also face significant threats from forest fires, landslides, storms, and typhoons that reach the countries of the Greater Mekong sub-region. The National Committee for Disaster Management provides overall leadership for the Plan of Action for Disaster Risk Reduction coordination in Cambodia and has adopted the Cambodian Red Cross Society as its primary partner for relief operations.

Laos is highly exposed to climate and disaster risks and the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare is responsible for disaster response management and relief. Droughts,
floods, and storms are the most prevalent hazards and are expected to become more severe. These events have significant impacts on the agricultural sector, a critical part of the economy which represents about 24 per cent of GDP and 64 per cent of employment. Poorer communities suffer the worst consequences in the aftermath of disasters, as they are more vulnerable, less resilient and cannot recover as quickly. This further raises their levels of vulnerability and undermines their existing coping mechanisms. Laos also continues to deal with unexploded ordnance and bombs in many areas.

Thailand has comparably strong disaster management systems and structures but remains at risk of major disasters such as floods, tropical cyclones, droughts and extreme temperatures (cold and hot). In 2020, the country faced a triple disaster of COVID-19, droughts and raging forest fires, creating huge challenges for the Government. As the effects of climate change exacerbate the severity of disasters in Asia, Thailand needs to strengthen disaster risk reduction at a community level and evaluate its past efforts, so it can better respond to future threats.

In Vietnam, natural hazards pose a significant risk to development gains and progress, and disasters have caused average economic losses amounting to 1–1.5 per cent of GDP over the last two decades.

Main actions and areas of support

The focus for this strategic priority will be on community-based disaster risk reduction, and to use the IFRC Preparedness for Effective Response (PER) approach to enhance National Society response capacity at all levels. All four National Societies are keen to embrace new tools and policies such as the IFRC disaster risk management strategy, Road to Resilience (R2), and enhanced Vulnerability and Capacity Assessment (ECVA). The PER self-assessment will be conducted in Laos this year, preparing the National Society to focus on addressing the critical priorities and components it identifies. In Cambodia, the IFRC will support the National Society to introduce PER to National Society leadership and management and to carry out a self-assessment.

The re-establishment of a Finnish Red Cross presence in Cambodia will support the Cambodian Red Cross Society by enhancing its capacity to respond to disasters. This will include developing community contingency plans, carrying out an enhanced Vulnerability and Capacity Assessment and creating a community risk reduction plan of action for the coming years, with funding support from the European Commission’s Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection Pilot Programme Partnership.

The Lao Red Cross works closely with the Government and is supporting the development and establishment of its Disaster Emergency Fund Decree. When the fund comes into effect, it will enable the National Society to strengthen its position as an auxiliary to the Government in Laos, with a focus on disaster management and disaster risk reduction so it can respond immediately to any emergency.

Under this strategic priority, the Swiss Red Cross will continue the support to the Lao Red Cross to prepare for effective response through interventions such as response teams, procedures and standard operating procedures at both national and branch levels. The IFRC will continue to extend technical and funding support to the National Society and Swiss Red Cross to implement the PER workplan, along with response capacity at all levels. In addition, cash and voucher assistance readiness will be an IFRC priority, ensuring the Lao Red Cross is ready to deploy cash and voucher assistance in future emergencies.

In Thailand, replicating and improving the PhonPhai mobile app will be the major focus for the next two years, along with passing knowledge, technology, and support to the Vietnam Red Cross Society to introduce the app if funding is secured.

Health and wellbeing

Achieving good health for all people remains a major challenge in all four countries, and for Cambodia in particular. Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, Cambodia had a high prevalence of communicable diseases due to limited access to safe drinking water and sanitation facilities. At 37 per cent, the nation has the lowest sanitation coverage. It also has the second-lowest water supply coverage in the region, at 77 per cent, resulting in high child mortality directly associated with diarrheal diseases.

According to the World Wide Fund for Nature, Cambodia is a global hotspot for the transmission of emerging, re-emerging and epidemic-prone diseases – in particular, zoonotic diseases such as avian influenza and rabies, which are increasingly concerning. These diseases need multi-sector and multi-disciplinary approaches to preparedness and response, and these approaches are currently lacking in the country. Key drivers of risk to zoonotic diseases in Cambodia include low-risk perception, misinformed practices such as consuming animals known to be sick or found dead, the close co-habitation
of animals in cooking and sleeping areas, wet markets and the consumption of wild meats.

As well as dengue fever and drug-resistant malaria, it is important that other diseases that can lead to epidemics remain high on the agenda for preparedness interventions. Recent high-risk diseases detected in Cambodia and the surrounding countries include foot and mouth disease (Svay Rieng province in February 2022), avian influenza (Siem Reap in March 2022), African swine fever, Middle East respiratory syndrome (MERS) and the Nipah virus. Rabies continues to kill approximately 800 people in Cambodia every year, despite the existence of a common vaccine.

The health sector in Laos faces many challenges, including a shortage of adequately trained personnel, weak infrastructure, a limited ability to conduct surveillance of infectious diseases and respond to outbreaks, limited maternal and child health care coverage, and an overstretched health care workforce. The country faces heightened pandemic infectious disease threats due to a combination of its location in the heart of the Mekong region and rapid socio-economic changes that increase cross-border commerce and migration. Maternal and child mortality rates are among the highest in the region, with almost 20,000 children under the age of five dying each year from diarrhoea, malnutrition, and respiratory diseases. Providing education and work for people living with disabilities also remains a serious problem in Laos.

In Thailand, non-communicable diseases accounted for the bulk of morbidity and mortality before the COVID-19 pandemic. Infectious diseases like malaria and tuberculosis, as well as road accidents and air pollution, are also major public health concerns. The COVID-19 pandemic was an unprecedented disaster globally, and for Thailand in particular. Its GDP depends heavily on tourism and services, so the pandemic was a devastating blow to the economy, causing drastic damage to the income and livelihoods of hundreds of thousands of people around the country. Coupled with the impact of natural disasters, the economic impact of the pandemic can be severe, especially for the most vulnerable groups of the population.

Although Vietnam has seen strong economic growth in recent years, it still needs significant investment in its healthcare sector. The lack of sufficient quantity and quality of water due to saline intrusion in many coastal areas, and the changing patterns of infectious diseases, pose new threats to health and livelihoods. As a tropical country, Vietnam is prone to diseases such as dengue fever, malaria, avian influenza, and hand, foot, and mouth disease. As a result of climate change, several climate-sensitive diseases have also transformed, resulting in more outbreaks and infectious cases, further threatening communities’ capacity to cope with health and economic impacts. The COVID-19 pandemic has been a test for the health system in Vietnam, and for the National Society’s capacity to respond to a public health crisis.

**Main actions and areas of support**

Since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, priority and resources have been focused on providing comprehensive support, capacity enhancement and tools to all four National Societies to strengthen their response to the virus. Priority has also been given to providing technical support to migrants living with HIV/AIDS in Cambodia, Laos, and Thailand, ensuring they can access antiretroviral treatment and care.

Water, sanitation and hygiene promotion remains a primary need in emergency operations within the Mekong countries, and this is a particular strength of the National Societies in Cambodia, Laos and Thailand. These three National Societies are recognized by public authorities as key water, sanitation and hygiene service providers in emergencies and in development. There is real potential to increase the regional leadership of The Thai Red Cross Society in this area.

The IFRC will continue to strengthen and promote cross-border cooperation and peer support between Laos and Thailand, Laos and Vietnam, and Thailand and Cambodia, in areas such as blood services and first aid, as well as epidemic and pandemic response and preparedness.

In response to the evolving risks associated with epidemics in Cambodia and the lack of capacity, particularly at sub-national levels, to respond, the Cambodian Red Cross Society and the Finnish Red Cross will coordinate with the IFRC to:

- Strengthen preparedness capacity at community and institutional levels
- Involve a broad base of stakeholders to contribute to these efforts
- Contribute to localized epidemic preparedness by working with communities, sub-national authorities (province, district and commune levels), national authorities and technical agencies to build community capacity to prevent, detect and prepare against epidemics.
They will also consolidate coordination and operational links between the Cambodian Red Cross Society and government counterparts in health, agriculture, and disaster management. Broadly, this will be achieved by:

- Improving understanding of the risks
- Better public education on health, hygiene, and sanitation
- Social mobilization to prevent and prepare for epidemics
- Training and capacity building for technical personnel and volunteers
- Better coordination and risk-informed preparedness planning at different levels of governance
- Generation of new knowledge on epidemic trends in Cambodia, including new emerging diseases and the impact of climate change on epidemic drivers

In Vietnam, the focus will be on raising awareness of non-communicable diseases, commercial first aid, water, sanitation and hygiene and enhancing the capacity of staff and volunteers in pandemic and epidemic preparedness.

First aid will be the top priority in Laos in the next few years. The Lao Red Cross plans to roll out first aid to the country’s most vulnerable communities, including schools, to socialize first aid and save more lives. Over the past three years, the IFRC, with financial support from the Japanese Red Cross Society, has supported the creation of a pool of trainers nationwide and has reached a number of schools, with lessons and case studies learned and documented. From 2023 to 2025, it will target six more provinces and roll out these interventions to at least 24 more schools.

In Thailand, the National Society will continue its flagship initiative of vaccinating migrant workers in the country, mobilizing resources and support from the public and partners, including the IFRC and the United States of America’s Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

The Japanese Red Cross Society and the Italian Red Cross are two major contributors to this strategic priority through the IFRC, as well as the Finnish Red Cross in Cambodia, through the European Commission’s Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection and IFRC Pilot Programme Partnership.

Migration and displacement

Within the four Mekong countries, people migrate through both regular and irregular channels, driven by employment opportunities, lack of livelihoods, family reunification, access to health care, education, seeking safety and protection or simply wanting a better life.

In 2021, the total population of the Asia Pacific region was more than 4.6 billion people, equating to around 60 per cent of the world’s population. Nearly 107 million people from Asia Pacific countries were living outside their countries of birth in 2021, accounting for nearly 40 per cent of the world’s 281 million international migrants.

COVID-19 and the ways governments responded to the virus have exacerbated the humanitarian challenges faced by migrants. In 2021, the region experienced massive returns of migrants to their countries of origin. Others remained stranded, often without access to justice. As many migrants in the region have testified, the combined pressures of the pandemic and the global recession have created a complex policy environment for return, reception and reintegration. More than 280,000 migrant workers from Thailand returned to Laos between March and April 2020.

Restricting the movement of people was essential to responding to the pandemic but had repercussions for migrants’ rights. All four Mekong countries imposed temporary restrictions on international travel, closing border crossing points, enhancing border surveillance, suspending visas and interrupting international flights. Many measures taken by governments had a negative impact on vulnerable migrants, such as forcibly returning them to fragile health systems in countries like Cambodia.

Migrants in the region were at increased risk of contracting COVID-19. This was due to a combination of factors, including barriers to accessing basic health services, unsanitary and overcrowded living conditions, barriers to adopting health-promoting behaviours, and exposure to infected people for those working as frontline or essential workers.

Humanitarian needs relating to migration, displacement and identity are complex and multi-dimensional. The IFRC has a long-standing commitment to working with and for migrants and displaced people and plays a crucial role in addressing the humanitarian consequences of migration and displacement in emergency and non-emergency contexts. It is also committed to strengthening the resilience of migrants, displaced people and host communities. National Societies are present along migratory routes, making them uniquely placed to respond to the needs of migrants and displaced people during their journeys, ensuring they have access to essential services and protection, whatever their legal status.
Main actions and areas of support

Asia Pacific National Societies, including those supported by the IFRC, have recently made a number of important commitments to increase local, national and regional capacity and action in response to the humanitarian consequences of migration and displacement. These are reflected in particular in the Manila Call for Action, which is a set of 21 commitments and 13 targets agreed by leaders of the Asia Pacific National Societies at the 10th Asia Pacific Regional Conference in the Philippines in November 2018.

• Notably, the National Societies of Cambodia, Laos and Thailand have received support over the past three years to improve awareness and education around safe migration across borders, and to improve support to migrants in Laos and Thailand during the pandemic. This included access to HIV services, information, personal protective equipment, hygiene measures, cooked meals, relief items and vaccinations. Governments and partners in these countries have recognized this support, and The Thai Red Cross Society remains a strong partner in rolling out vaccination to migrant workers living in the country.

In the years ahead, the IFRC will support all four National Societies to identify their needs and priorities to inform an action plan that is based on their strengths and limitations. All four National Societies have expressed interest in this strategic priority, and this will be addressed by thorough support, tailor-made to each country.

The Italian Red Cross is a primary contributor to this strategic priority, through the IFRC.

Values, power and inclusion

The four National Societies have focused on protection, gender and inclusion in recent years, and they have implemented a number of initiatives, including:

• Mainstreaming protection, gender and inclusion in their strategies, plans and services

• Training on specialized topics under protection, gender and inclusion mainstreaming

• Increasing the attention to preventing and responding to sexual and gender-based violence, in conjunction with research findings in Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam, and with the support of the IFRC and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations

Protection, gender and inclusion have also been integrated into all emergency operations and programmes within the four National Societies, including translating and applying minimum standards into operations such as the 2020 Vietnam floods operation and 2018 Lao floods operation.

Main actions and areas of support

The challenge and opportunity for the four National Societies in 2023 and beyond will be to prioritize the implementation of key recommendations from their recent sexual and gender-based violence research, as well as positioning themselves as strong actors in this area. They will do this in partnership with the relevant national authorities, such as ministries of health, national committees responsible for human affairs, specialized civil society organizations, and United Nations agencies with a presence in the countries. The IFRC will provide technical advice and capacity-building support to this process.

As part of the Manila Call for Action, Asia Pacific National Societies and the IFRC have identified priority areas of work in this area. The Mekong country National Societies will seek to strengthen women’s leadership initiatives, collect disaggregated data around sex, age and disability, and develop a policy for preventing sexual exploitation and abuse, clarifying referral mechanisms for reporting and support.

Revitalizing the Southeast Asia Protection, Gender and Inclusion Network is a priority for the IFRC, with a view to strengthening peer learning and mainstreaming protection, gender and inclusion in emergencies. The network’s terms of reference have been updated, and regular meetings are held by the IFRC throughout the year, allowing National Societies to meet and coordinate on key initiatives.

In 2020, the IFRC successfully supported the revitalization of the Southeast Asia Youth Network, which had fallen silent since 2017. The network enjoyed the renewed endorsement of Southeast Asian National Societies leaders and actively contributed to revitalizing the broader Asia Pacific Youth Network. The IFRC will continue to coordinate and support the Southeast Asia Youth Network and other IFRC network youth activities in Southeast Asia, with a focus on scaling up the youth as agents of behavioural change in the region. It will also integrate these activities into other thematic training, contributing to the development of new programmes on humanitarian education. In 2021 and 2022, it fostered and broadened strong cooperation with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations partners for youth engagement. This fruitful collaboration is expected to continue into 2023 and beyond.
Enabling local actors

The National Societies in the Mekong region are committed to pursuing institutional strengthening and have all recently carried out reviews and development activities. They are now in the process of operationalizing their plans. As part of their priorities, all four strive to increase their relevance in the face of evolving humanitarian and social needs, and to be recognized as partners of choice.

The Vietnam Red Cross Society carried out an Organisational Capacity Assessment and Certification (OCAC) review in 2022, and the Lao Red Cross has expressed its intention to do the same. The self-assessment part of this process is intended to capture the strengths and weaknesses of National Societies as a whole in relation to a wide range of organizational capacities.

Each National Society faces a different set of challenges relating to their country and institutional context, and they are each addressing those with the support of the IFRC and network partners.

In order for the Cambodian Red Cross Society to address the country’s humanitarian needs, it requires support with resource mobilization. Specifically, it needs stronger reporting and accountability mechanisms. Without these, its efforts to scale up actions and interventions for the most vulnerable people in Cambodia will be held back.

In Laos, the National Society continues to consolidate and promote its position through a series of changes to its legal bases and institution, including a massive effort to disseminate Red Cross Law which was approved in 2017, along with developing new Decrees under the Law to regulate the National Society’s structure, position, infrastructure, reputation, and accountability. It has had great success in recent years, with significant support from the IFRC through the Red Ready initiative. However, the Lao Red Cross continues to face challenges in terms of dependency on both government and external financial support. More focus will be needed on improving staff and volunteer operational capacity and decentralization to allow innovation and resource synergy to flourish at the branch level.

Like other countries in the region, Thailand has recently faced a surging Consumer Price Index, which will have an increasing impact on people who depend on tourism and services for their livelihoods, as well as on migrant workers in the country. At this stage, political turmoil is not predicted, as the current Government does its best to compromise between parties and people to move the country forward.
The Vietnam Red Cross Society is undergoing a transformation process led by the president and her team, with the aim of becoming a more efficient, effective, and agile National Society which is better positioned to respond to the evolving humanitarian landscape and tackle global issues at a local level. Its transformation vision includes significant adjustments to human resource structures, systems and processes, information management and technology, resource mobilization and international and public relations. This process has been going on in the background while the Vietnam Red Cross Society delivered significant programmes and humanitarian response services during the pandemic. Implementing a change process while continuing business as usual is, understandably, very demanding. Government limitations on external funding are also challenging for the National Society in Vietnam.

**Main actions and areas of support**

The IFRC will continue to support the Mekong countries National Societies with the priorities they identify in their strategic and development plans. It will emphasize volunteering, integrity, transparency, and accountability as critical aspects of strong National Societies. For volunteering, this will include new ways of engaging volunteers, managing volunteer data, and improving volunteer safety and well-being. Integrity, transparency, and accountability will include strengthening National Societies’ legal base and auxiliary role, as well as policy development and system support for finance, human resources, planning, monitoring, evaluation, and reporting.

The IFRC hosts and convenes the Southeast Asia Networks of National Societies for leadership, youth and for practitioners working on protection, gender and inclusion, and community safety and resilience. It will continue to leverage these networks for peer exchange, knowledge sharing and development.

The IFRC will also focus on embedding recent IFRC and Movement statutory resolutions and commitments, including anticipatory action, the Climate and Environmental Charter, and IFRC policies on volunteering, first aid, and protection, gender and inclusion. It will also support investment in leadership cultures that include women and minority groups.

There is a strong demand from National Societies for support to build their resource mobilization skills. With more diverse, predictable, sustainable resources, National Societies will become stronger organizations which are more able to continuously support communities. Localized resource mobilization and generation will also allow them to respond to growing and changing humanitarian needs at a time when international funding is more stretched than ever.

The IFRC will work on a long-term approach to develop resource mobilization and financial sustainability. This will include working with National Societies to develop resource mobilization plans which suit their individual context and needs, based on data such as core cost analysis, market assessment and financial sustainability indicators. The IFRC will coordinate and align partner support in this area, including digitalizing fundraising systems and tools and enabling peer between National Societies, with the National Society remaining in overall control.

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**THE IFRC NETWORK**

**The IFRC**

From its base in Bangkok, Thailand, the IFRC works with the four National Societies of Cambodia, Laos, Thailand and Vietnam to enhance their institutional capacity, respond to humanitarian needs in the event of disaster and crisis, implement long-term programmes, and supports accountability as a cross-cutting theme.

In recent years, the IFRC has supported the Vietnam Red Cross Society through a number of Disaster Response Emergency Fund (DREF) and Emergency Appeal operations relating to storms and floods, drought and salt water intrusion and typhoons. It also supported the Lao Red Cross through the DREF for several flood operations, and in 2022 also supported the Thailand Red Cross Society for floods. As of October 2022, all three National Societies were running DREF operations. Through its global appeal, the IFRC has also supported the National Societies for their COVID-19 response since the start of the pandemic.

The IFRC also supports the National Societies to leverage their auxiliary role and influence regional, national and subnational processes to ensure more effective laws and policies for climate, disaster risk management and
emergency preparedness and response, including for public health emergencies. It also focuses on support around civil-military relations and on engaging the military and other security forces in disasters. This includes holding high-level discussions with National Society leadership to discuss civil-military relations trends and preparing them to engage effectively in civil-military relations, disseminating the relevant Movement Handbook and developing an initial civil-military relations plan.

Membership coordination

In terms of coordination, the IFRC works with member National Societies to:

- Assess the humanitarian context, humanitarian situations and needs
- Agree on common priorities
- Co-develop common strategies to address issues such as obtaining greater humanitarian access, acceptance and space, mobilizing funding and other resources
- Clarify consistent public messaging
- Monitor progress

It also ensures that strategies and programmes supporting people in need include clarity of humanitarian action, development assistance and the auxiliary role of National Societies, in order to reinforce those National Societies’ roles in their respective countries.

The IFRC holds regular meetings with its membership both in Bangkok and in their respective countries to improve collaboration and coordination and to optimize resources to support them. This includes joint planning, coordination meetings on National Society development (Laos and Vietnam), preparedness for effective response and cash and voucher assistance (Laos) and the PhonPhai mobile app (Thailand and Vietnam).

The IFRC also collaborates and coordinates with the Swiss Red Cross in Laos and in Vietnam, considering National Society development in general and focusing specifically on disaster risk management, resource mobilization, financial sustainability and, in Laos, preparedness for effective response. In Vietnam, the IFRC coordinates and works closely with the American Red Cross to implement the Red Ready and Greening Disaster Risk Reduction initiatives and provides technical support in the area of cash and voucher assistance, Organisational Capacity Assessment and Certification, and Greening Disaster Risk Reduction.

Cambodia

In 2022, the Finnish Red Cross reopened its office and presence in Phnom Penh after five years. It currently has one representative embedded in the Cambodian Red Cross Society. The National Society in Cambodia is part of the global Pilot Programmatic Partnership (PPP) between the Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (ECHO) and the IFRC, benefitting from the support of the Finnish Red Cross to implement activities in disaster risk management, epidemics and pandemic preparedness and response, and risk communication, community engagement and accountability. This partnership meets the needs of extended crises with longer-term predictable funding, facilitating actions and processes with greater impact. It leverages the IFRC’s global network and unique access to people and communities, and it helps to fulfil the ambitions of the European Union as the world’s biggest donor for international aid.

The IFRC will work closely with the Finnish Red Cross to ensure the ECHO PPP is implemented in a coordinated and effective manner, through its technical support to the Cambodian Red Cross Society on disaster risk management, and community engagement and accountability.

Laos

Currently, only the Swiss Red Cross has a presence in Laos. For the last two decades, it has supported the Lao Red Cross with disaster risk management, health, water, sanitation and hygiene, and National Society development. The presence of the Swiss Red Cross in the country supports both the Lao Red Cross and the Ministry of Health through a long-term partnership. It has also been active in supporting the National Society in Laos through emergency operations on needs assessment, water, sanitation and hygiene, shelter, and non-food items.

Through the IFRC, the Japanese Red Cross Society has been providing financial support to the Lao Red Cross for first aid education, emergency wash promotion and capacity building, while The Thai Red Cross Society’s support focuses on building a central warehouse as part of preparedness for effective response.

The Lao Red Cross has also enjoyed the close collaboration and support from National Societies such as the Red Cross Society of China (disaster risk reduction), Korean Red Cross (health), the Singapore Red Cross Society and the Vietnam Red Cross Society (emergency response).
The IFRC, with the support of the Lao Red Cross, has one representative in Vientiane who works and coordinates closely with the Lao Red Cross on a daily basis. This officer is embedded in the organization on a Lao Red Cross contract, while the IFRC continues pursuing its legal status in the country since the collapse of the Attapeu dam operation which triggered international humanitarian assistance.

**Thailand**

The IFRC and participating National Societies provided significant support to The Thai Red Cross Society during the 2005 Indian Ocean tsunami operation, laying strong foundations for preparing for effective response and building capacity at various levels. The IFRC has been a consistent and active partner present in the country, providing regular funding to The Thai Red Cross Society to enhance its capacity in disaster risk reduction and to develop the PhonPhai mobile app. The app has gone viral in recent years and is now known to millions of Thais and non-Thais. In addition, the IFRC has provided technical and financial support to The Thai Red Cross Society during its COVID-19 pandemic operation, reaching almost a million Thais and migrant workers living in the country.

**Vietnam**

The American Red Cross, German Red Cross and Swiss Red Cross all have a presence in Vietnam. The American Red Cross focuses its support on disaster risk management, Greening Disaster Risk Reduction (climate action) and National Society development, while the Swiss Red Cross focuses on resource mobilization. The German Red Cross is due to close its office in the last quarter of 2022. The Canadian Red Cross Society and Korean Red Cross have shown interest in future partnerships.

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**Movement coordination**

The IFRC and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) hold regular discussions to coordinate work at management, programme and support service levels. This is carried out in line with the Strengthening Movement Coordination and Cooperation principles and the newly adopted Seville Agreement 2.0. Since the IFRC relocated its office in 2021, it is now based in the same building as the ICRC in Bangkok, facilitating good communications. The two organizations work together to support the strengthening and updating of the National Society legal bases in accordance with the Guidance on National Society Statutes, as well as continuing to collaborate on communications. The ICRC took part in country-level planning discussions with the Lao Red Cross and Vietnam Red Cross Society as part of this planning alignment process. It also takes part in the Southeast Asia National Societies Leaders meeting convened by the IFRC.

The ICRC has a regional presence in Bangkok and field offices in the north and south of Thailand. It supports on migration and displacement, youth, restoring family links and communication, and has also made in-kind and financial contributions to The Thai Red Cross Society’s COVID-19 operation. The ICRC opened a Mekong sub-office in Vietnam in 2021, covering Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam, where it focuses on restoring family links, international humanitarian law, migration and displacement, safer access and communications, as well as legal preparedness and dissemination and youth-related activities in Laos.

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**Coordination with other actors**

In line with their auxiliary roles, all four National Societies engage extensively in their national coordination disaster risk management mechanisms. They also collaborate with ministries and departments on a broad range of activities and with public authorities at all levels.

The IFRC engages with United Nations agencies based in Bangkok and is a permanent observer to the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific. In 2023, it will be exploring memoranda of understanding and more formal partnerships with these agencies to strengthen collaboration in the region. The IFRC also engages formally within humanitarian coordination platforms in Bangkok, and chairs the technical working groups on emergency preparedness, cash, protection, risk communication and community engagement.
With IFRC support, the Vietnam Red Cross Society leads the shelter cluster in disasters. The Global Shelter Cluster is an Inter-Agency Standing Committee coordination mechanism, and the IFRC has led it in disaster contexts since this approach was established in 2005. This critical mandate places the IFRC as a lead agency in the international humanitarian coordination system. It leverages this leadership position in the Global Shelter Cluster for better coordination, stronger policies and standards across the sector, and better support for affected people in their recovery.

The IFRC in Bangkok supports the IFRC in Jakarta to engage with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations secretariat work programme priorities. It is also exploring closer collaboration with the private sector, working across borders such as Thai CP Group which has been supporting the Vietnam Red Cross Society and has also expressed an interest in supporting the National Societies of Cambodia and Laos.
The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) is the world's largest humanitarian network, with **192 National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies** and around **14 million volunteers**. Our volunteers are present in communities before, during and after a crisis or disaster. We work in the most hard to reach and complex settings in the world, saving lives and promoting human dignity. We support communities to become stronger and more resilient places where people can live safe and healthy lives, and have opportunities to thrive.

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