



# Albanian Red Cross

## Unified Plan

### Mid-year report 2024

Click [here](#) for the data dashboard.

Click [here](#) for the interim financial report.

This 2024 Mid-year Report reflects the activities of the Albanian Red Cross, its Partner National Societies and the IFRC Secretariat between January - June 2024.

[Albanian Red Cross](#)

[Austrian Red Cross](#)

[Croce Rossa Italiana \(cri.it\)](#)

[IFRC Global Innovation Hub](#): Fosters innovative approaches to humanitarian challenges.

[IFRC Reference Centre for Psychosocial Support](#): Provides expertise in psychosocial support during emergencies.

[IFRC Climate Centre](#): Specializes in climate-related humanitarian action.

[IFRC Data and Digital Lab](#): Leverages data and technology for enhanced humanitarian response.



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# Overview

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## Context

Albania is classified as a middle-income country and officially became a candidate for accession to the European Union (EU) in 2014. According to [the latest census data](#), the population of Albania was estimated to be 2,412,113, with 50.4 per cent women and 49.6 per cent men. In 2011, Albania had a population of 2.8 million. This indicates a decrease of approximately 14.5 per cent in Albania's population over the span of 12 years. According to the United Nations' medium projection scenario, the number of people living in Albania is projected to decline by 20 per cent or more in the next three decades.

With the decline of traditional family structures and the high migration of younger family members, many older people are left alone with little social interaction. Besides social isolation, many older people also face financial struggles. Older people living alone in rural areas are particularly vulnerable as they often have no access to formal long-term care, be it residential care or home care services.

According to a recent study<sup>1</sup>, around 91,000 older people in Albania need long-term care, but only 2 per cent of them are currently receiving formal long-term care services and most of them rely on family members, in particular, unpaid female informal caregivers. Due to high emigration rates of health workers, there is a lack of medical staff in many rural and remote areas of Albania. In the urban areas, despite the presence of medical staff, the health centres have large inflows with a ratio of one doctor per 2,500 patients and one nurse per 500 patients. With limitations in staff, the state-funded home visits, that are foreseen to be provided by doctors or patronage nurses in case the patient is unable to move and needs such service, is extremely challenging. In rural areas this service is even less available due to the big distances and the missing transport possibilities of the medical team. A [recent study from the Albanian Network of Older People](#) found that 16 per cent of people aged 65+ were not able to access medical care when needed. The main reasons for this are an inability to afford medical treatment, long distances to medical facilities or severe pain/illness.

The Albanian authorities have successfully steered the economy through successive shocks, thanks to broadly appropriate macroeconomic policies. After a major earthquake in 2019, the global pandemic in 2020, and the escalation of hostilities in Ukraine in 2022, the economy has rebounded, emerging as one of the better performers in the region. Inflation peaked at lower rates than in regional peers, in part due to energy self-sufficiency, and limited direct financial and trade linkages to Russia and Ukraine. The rising role of tourism as a propeller of growth has helped increase confidence in the country's prospects, a factor partly reflected in the steady appreciation of the Albanian Lek<sup>2</sup> basic over the years.<sup>3</sup>

Due to a combination of political, geographic, and social factors, Albania is recognized as vulnerable to climate change impacts, ranked 80 out of 185 countries.<sup>4</sup> Infrastructure needs and

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<sup>1</sup> International Labor Organization (ILO), 2022

<sup>2</sup> Albanian currency

<sup>3</sup> International Monetary Fund (IMF), [Albania Country Report No. 24/7](#), January 2024

<sup>4</sup> [ND-GAIN Country Index](#), 2021

poverty in rural areas aggravate its vulnerability to numerous natural hazards, including hydro-meteorological hazards, such as floods, droughts, forest fires, and landslides. The country is also at high-risk to geophysical hazards such as earthquakes. Changes to climate, specifically the frequency of extreme weather events and temperature variations, are expected to have the most significant impacts to the country's key sectors, its economy and population.<sup>5</sup>

Like other Western Balkan countries, Albania has also been affected by mixed population flows, influenced not solely by socio-economic factors, but also by the repercussions of conflicts occurring globally. The number of irregular migrants apprehended in Albania is increasing every year, while there is generally an insufficient number of border and migration officers, reception centre personnel and asylum officials to cope with the increased number of arrivals and asylum requests of recent years.

## Key achievements

In 2024, notable accomplishments were achieved, marking significant milestones in various aspects:

- To strengthen the role and position of the Albanian Red Cross (ARC) among key partner organizations of the Civil Protection structure, the ARC has successfully completed the Advanced First Aid (AFA) Training of Trainers (ToT) in cooperation with experts from the Austrian Red Cross. Twelve volunteers from seven local branches participated in this training. Thanks to this initiative, the ARC has enhanced and expanded its capacities in AFA, establishing trained volunteer teams capable of delivering appropriate AFA services. These teams provide specialized assistance in disaster situations and mass casualty accidents.
- In collaboration with the Spanish Red Cross, the ARC launched a pilot project aimed at enhancing its capabilities in providing water lifeguard services, primarily along the coastline of the Durres region. With the guidance of Spanish Red Cross experts, 21 volunteers from four local branches successfully completed lifeguard training. The curriculum focused on equipping volunteers with skills to prevent, protect, and respond effectively to emergencies both in and out of the water.
- To enhance the National Society's capacities in providing Cash Transfer Programming, the ARC conducted the training "Level II Cash Transfer Programming for Cash and Voucher Assistance (CVA)." This training involved the participation of Secretaries and Administrators from the 12 major branches. The sessions were facilitated by ARC staff and technically supported by the CVA Delegate from the Country Cluster Delegation (CCD) Central and Southeastern Europe (CSEE), based in Sarajevo.
- To address the basic needs of the most vulnerable families in the country, more than 1,600 families in vulnerable situations have been reached with food assistance and other relief items.
- As part of efforts to strengthen cooperation with the Civil Protection Structure at both national and local levels, the ARC has actively participated in various significant events and field exercises. During these engagements, the ARC staff and volunteers demonstrated

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<sup>5</sup> The World Bank, Climate Risk Profile: Albania, 2021

their robust capabilities in disaster management, showcasing their readiness and expertise in handling critical situations effectively.

## Changes and amendments

During the reporting period, no major changes have been identified in the context and the foreseen actions.

## IFRC Network Action

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### Ongoing emergency response

During the year 2024 there were no ongoing emergency operations for which an Emergency Appeal has been launched or reflected in the external IFRC Network country plans.

## Strategic Priorities

### Climate and environment

Due to climate change, the ARC will face more and larger operations and disasters of a different nature, adding up to greater demands on its capacities. The ARC is actively adapting risk reduction activities and early-warning procedures to the changing hazards, including the need to communicate them effectively to the people at risk for recovery from more frequent, intense, or unfamiliar disasters.

Since the beginning of the summer period, information on measures for preventing and early recognizing the consequences of heatwaves was disseminated through social media platforms, promoting public awareness and safety reaching at least 15,000 people.

In June 2024, a workshop on the Simplified Early Action Protocol was organized with the support of the Austrian Red Cross and the IFRC. The workshop was attended by three local branches that are typically affected by heatwaves as well as the representatives from the Institute of Geosciences and Institute of Public Health. The discussions focused on the importance of taking proactive measures ahead of the hazard's impact and recognizing predefined thresholds for triggers. Additionally, discussions with the local branches covered the most affected groups and areas and identifying eligible and most effective activities to manage and mitigate the impacts of heatwaves.

### Disasters and crises

Albania is prone to numerous natural hazards, including, hydro-meteorological hazards: floods, droughts, forest fires, and landslides. The country is also at high-risk to geophysical hazards such as earthquakes. Disaster management is one of the core functions of the ARC with its auxiliary role aimed to support the state with humanitarian assistance to save lives and assist people hit by disasters, as well as prepare to respond for future emergencies and reduce people's vulnerability to expected hazards.

The ARC cooperates closely with governmental authorities especially on disaster preparedness and response. According to the National Plan of Civil Protection, the ARC is a member of the Albanian Disaster Management Structure on local, regional and national level.

As part of efforts to strengthen cooperation with the Civil Protection Structure at both national and local levels, the ARC has actively participated in various significant events and field exercises. During these engagements, the ARC staff and volunteers demonstrated their robust capabilities in disaster management, showcasing their readiness and expertise in handling critical situations effectively.

In collaboration with the Spanish Red Cross, the ARC launched a pilot project aimed at enhancing its capabilities in providing water lifeguard services, primarily along the coastline of the Durres region. With the guidance of Spanish Red Cross experts, 21 volunteers from four local branches have successfully completed lifeguard training. The curriculum focused on equipping volunteers with skills to prevent, protect, and respond effectively to emergencies both in and out of the water.

In 2024, the ARC continued its dedicated support for people affected by crises and disasters, ensuring their needs were met with timely, adequate and flexible assistance. During small-scale local crises, 120 families (600 people) received food parcels, along with essential accommodation items like blankets, kitchen sets, beds and mattresses.

## Health and wellbeing

Albania is experiencing the ageing of its population, emigration of youth and loneliness of older people in various regions. Addressing the needs of the increasingly ageing population will also be an area where further policy interventions are required. Most evidence so far indicates increased needs for health care for older people.

### **Health preventive activities**

More than 1,000 primary and high schools students have benefited from educational sessions focused on personal and community hygiene, prevention of addictive substances use and "HIV/AIDS" and environmental protection activities.

Several awareness raising campaigns, including World Health Day (7 April), World No Tobacco Day (31 May), International Day against Drug Abuse and Illegal Trafficking (26 June) were organized reaching more than 20,000 people. Furthermore, 6,000 pieces of Information, Education, and Communication (IEC) materials promoting healthy living, volunteer blood donation, and health risk awareness were distributed to the local population.

### **First Aid (FA) activities**

With the aim to strengthen FA services across all local branches, the ARC, in cooperation with experts of the Austrian Red Cross, has successfully completed the AFA ToT. The training was attended by 12 volunteers from seven local branches recently engaged in the programme. Over a nine-day curriculum, participants expanded their skills in AFA, enabling the ARC to strengthen its capacities. Trained volunteer teams are now equipped to provide specialized AFA services during disasters and mass casualty accidents.

In total, 22,666 individuals seeking driver's license as well as employees from various companies and institutions were trained in FA.

## **Blood donation**

During the reporting period, a total of 2,595 blood units were donated. On 14 June, on a World Blood Donor Day, a national awareness campaign was organized reaching more than 10,000 people through promotional activities led by local branches. Key messages and information promoting voluntary blood donation were disseminated across various social media platforms.

## **Social care**

To address the basic needs of the most vulnerable families in the country, more than 1,600 families in vulnerable situations have received food assistance and other essential relief items.

Additionally, 603 vulnerable older people have been provided with integrated health and social support services aimed at maintaining and restoring their ability to live independently in their familiar environment for as long as possible. This support included:

- Operating eight Daily Social Centres providing opportunities for social interaction and enhancing their physical, mental and social well-being.
- Conducting home visits across seven local branches to ensure their wellbeing and independence.
- Providing hot meals through the Vlora branch.
- Referring high risk patients and older people to the nearest public health centres for further specialized follow-up.

## **Mental health activities**

To enhance public awareness of the importance of mental health, 39 local branches organized an online national campaign during the Mental Health Awareness Week (13 - 19 May 2024). The campaign aimed to increase mental health awareness among population and reduce the stigma associated with mental illness. Key messages emphasized understanding mental health, preventive measures and importance of seeking professional support when needed, reaching more than 10,000 people. Additionally, 603 older people received psychosocial sessions, with additional 120 older people receiving remote psychosocial support via phone and additional 100 people supported through the Green Line, a toll-free line.

The capacities of the ARC in the area of mental health are continuously strengthened through the support of the [IFRC Reference Center for Psychosocial Support](#) (PS Centre). Psychosocial support (PSS) is being provided to communities in risk and vulnerable groups, in addition to volunteers and staff mostly engaged in responding to disasters or humanitarian crises. PSS is an integral part of the entire range of the ARC's humanitarian activities, such as disaster preparedness and response, social projects, first aid and health programmes.

## **Health care**

Extreme weather events, air quality and communicable diseases are identified as priority health risks under a changing climate. Albania is vulnerable to climate-health impacts due to its current underdeveloped public health system. Primary healthcare lacks appropriate funding and human resources. The coverage of insurance-based care is low, and the public hospital sector remains underdeveloped, and the private sector is growing without proper regulation.

The ARC strives to continue its 'flagship' programmes within the health sector, including first aid and road safety, blood donation promotion, communicable and non-communicable disease interventions, psychosocial support programmes. One of the strategic goals identifies the complementary role of the ARC to continue supporting government, communities, and other organizations to alleviate suffering and promote a healthier and happier population in the country.

We contribute to reducing the vulnerability of individuals and communities by offering awareness activities about personal and community hygiene, as well as about the prevention of infectious diseases such as AIDS and tuberculosis, by increasing the attention towards road safety, through the promotion of the environment and its protection, as well as through the improvement of conditions at work, at home and on the street. More efforts are made in increasing the capacities of the ARC in the provision of health in emergency for a better response in any kind of emergency.

The ARC continues to strengthen the capacities in the area of first aid by provision of quality and science-based education in first aid to contribute to the provision of safe and healthy communities by preventing and reducing risks in everyday accidents and disasters.

## Migration and displacement

In November 2023, Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni and Albania Prime Minister Edi Rama signed [a five-year deal](#) in which Albania agreed to shelter up to 3,000 migrants rescued from international waters each month while Italy processes their asylum claims. With asylum requests expected to take around a month to process, the number of asylum-seekers sent to Albania could reach up to 36,000 in a year.

Under this agreement, Italy will pay for the construction of two reception centres in Albania (in Gjader and Shengjin) which can hold up to 3,000 migrants. The centers will represent in practice an "Italian enclave" on the Albanian territory as they will fully operate under Italian jurisdiction. The protocol foresees that these centers will be built and fully managed by the competent Italian authorities while the Albanian authorities are only in charge of ensuring the security of the perimeter outside these areas as well as during land transfers to and from these locations.

Children and pregnant women will be excluded from the plan. After asylum claims are processed, Italy will decide whether to resettle migrants in Italy or arrange their deportation.

In June 2024, Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni traveled to Albania to thank its government for its unique role in agreeing to host thousands of asylum-seekers while Italy processes their claims. There has been a two-month delay in the opening of the centers, attributed to unforeseen structural reinforcements needed at one of the sites. It has been announced that both centres will be operational and prepared to accommodate the first 1,000 migrants by 1 August 2024. Additionally, a regular ferry link to Italy is planned to commence in mid-September 2024.

Currently, the ARC is monitoring the situation, no action took place so far, until the discussion among Movement partners such as Italian Red cross, ICRC, IFRC etc are concluded.

## Migration response

Relief assistance was provided to 30 migrants and 120 clothes boxes were distributed to migrants accommodated at the reception centre in Babrru, Tirana. Additionally, Restoring Family Links (RFL) support was provided to 10 migrants.

## Values, power and inclusion

The ARC helps and supports people in need through the activities and programmes promoting volunteering and respecting human dignity.

To promote volunteering and humanitarian values, the ARC aims at being close to people in the most vulnerable situations and raising public awareness of their needs. Placing the Red Cross and its role in society at the centre of services supports the way Red Cross delivers humanitarian assistance and social services. By investing the necessary time and resources into Red Cross membership development across the country, the ARC aims to provide communities with the knowledge and skills that ensure their resilience in times of emergency and sustainable support for those who are most in need of help.

Efforts are made to integrate Community Engagement and Accountability (CEA) in the ARC activities on headquarters (HQ) and branch level. This includes increasing number of people from the general population reached by the ARC with external awareness campaigns aimed at increasing their awareness and understanding of the Red Cross Red Crescent (RCRC) emblem, the Fundamental Principles, and International Humanitarian Law (IHL) to ensure safe access of staff and volunteers during any humanitarian intervention.

The ARC has taken proactive steps to enhance communication, response and feedback from the communities. The ARC established communication channels, including a toll-free Green Line where people can call freely voice their needs and concerns. A total of 120 calls/requests from the field were received, out of which 100 were followed up and supported by dedicated staff who provided relief support and PSS.

Additionally, the ARC is regularly conducting satisfaction questionnaires during family visits allowing people to provide honest feedback about the support received and their ongoing needs.

The ARC reached 858 people with Protection, Gender and Inclusion (PGI) activities to reduce stigma and discrimination related to ageing and chronic diseases. These activities encouraged their participation in different programmes and accessing essential health care services.

To facilitate integration into the educational system, 75 children at risk of school dropout received social and educational support. Their families also participated in discussions on the importance of education and addressing social and economic challenges to better support their children's education.

The 27<sup>th</sup> National Art Exhibit "Children and the Red Cross" was conducted across the country with participation of 3,000 children from 250 primary schools. This traditional event aimed to raise awareness of the Red Cross International Movement, its Fundamental Principles and Humanitarian Values among students.

Under the project Road Safety, in cooperation with the General Directorate of Road Transport several awareness activities and demonstrations of FA techniques were organized with students from primary and high schools reaching over 1,500 persons across eight major districts.

As part of the "Flood Resilience Alliance 2.0" project, 460 interviews were conducted with community members to gather their feedback on the project's impact and results. These interviews also assessed the resilience of selected communities in coping with flood emergencies. Communities' leaders (10 persons) regularly met to discuss challenges faced by community members during emergency situation in order to provide better support for affected communities.

To enhance the National Society's capacities in providing Cash Transfer Programming, the ARC conducted the training "Level II Cash Transfer Programming for CVA". This training involved the participation of Secretaries and Administrators from the 12 major branches. During the training, a qualitative time was dedicated to CEA component focused on integrating community understanding, participation, communication and feedback during CVA interventions, as well as in other modalities of humanitarian aid provision.

## Enabling functions

### Strategic and operational coordination

The ARC is dedicated to its ongoing development by actively expanding its presence and engagement throughout the country. This effort is aimed at ensuring proximity to communities while enhancing transparency, accountability, and sustainable partnerships. Collaboration with partners is pivotal in increasing the effectiveness of service delivery, ultimately making a positive impact in the lives of people in vulnerable situations. The aim is to further expand collaboration and draw attention to humanitarian and development needs in the country. The ARC is working to establish and maintain effective cooperation and coordination mechanisms with Movement partners present in the country and/or other partners supporting the ARC.

In November 2023, a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed between the National Civil Protection Agency (NCPA) and the ARC to enhance collaboration on disaster preparedness and response. The MoU, which took effect in 2024 and is set for long-term duration, aims to improve the country's Civil Protection system. Under this agreement, the NCPA will oversee and coordinate national disaster response efforts, while the ARC will leverage its network of volunteers to directly assist affected communities. This partnership combines the NCPA's management capabilities with the ARC's community outreach to effectively address and mitigate the impacts of disasters.

### National Society development

Given the fact that the main aim is to prevent and alleviate the suffering of the people and protect the dignity for every individual, mobilizing all effective means and resources is imperative. Acting in three main directions includes strengthening the National Society, further developing elements of humanitarian diplomacy and fostering more efficient and transparent collaboration with all partners. This includes the expansion of the ARC cooperation on service provision with state institutions and the private sector. An essential aspect of supporting National Society development involves a strong focus on engaging new volunteers and members at the community level. The

volunteering policy has been updated in cooperation with the Spanish Red Cross, customizing the Volunteer Management database to enhance efficiency and strengthen the volunteer base. Under the Empress Shôken Fund (ESF) funded project "End Suffering, Stop Human Trafficking," 25 ARC-certified trainers from diverse backgrounds including high school teachers, long-term ARC volunteers, psychologists, and others have educated a network of 400 volunteers on human trafficking. This initiative represents a significant step forward in combatting human trafficking and making a meaningful impact.

The ARC also works to increase development efforts in domestic (individual, corporate, digital) fundraising, conduct regular review and mapping of domestic and international partnership as well as to develop and firmly establish resource mobilization and income generating activities, especially in order to have strengthened and well-functioning local branches for a strong National Society.

In 2024, three important applications were submitted for support, respectively on:

- Disaster: the project proposal "Regional First Aid Development and Preparedness Initiative in Southeast Europe". With this project, the ARC will be able to train more than 300 staff and volunteers in AFA and will strengthen the capacity and resilience of targeted communities. This project did not meet the current qualifications, but it has been placed on the reserve list by the European Commission.
- Health and care: the project proposal "Strengthening Health, Access, Participation and Social Equity in the Western Balkan countries" will address the needs of 400 older people and other vulnerable groups and it will increase the ARC's capacity in home care. This project has been approved and accepted by the donor.
- PGI: The project proposal "RC-BRAVE CERV DAPHNE" in cooperation with the IFRC will increase the capacity of the ARC to prevent and combat gender-based violence and violence against children. The evaluation of this project is estimated to be conducted at the end of November 2024.

Strengthening of communication mechanisms within the National Society is in place, adopting modern technologies and digitalization to promote activities, as well as to ensure effective and efficient internal and external communication.

## Humanitarian diplomacy

The ARC enjoys an important level of autonomy and independence to act in accordance with its mandate and auxiliary role in Albania. As an auxiliary to the government in the field of humanitarian action, the ARC demonstrates neutrality and ensures access to serve vulnerable people without hindrance. The ARC is committed to implementing specific measures to establish institutional modes of regular communication and advocacy, advocating for stronger partnerships between the ARC and public authorities to expand services.

The ARC has actively engaged in the cluster-wide humanitarian diplomacy (HD) extended network and cooperation established in exchanging information, best practices, key communication and advocacy messages, as well as strengthening HD capacities and skills. Throughout its work, the ARC has committed and will continue to align its activities with IFRC regional HD strategic planning and priorities.

## Accountability and agility (cross-cutting)

The ARC is committed to ensuring sustainable quality service delivery that makes a lasting impact on the individuals and communities it serves. This commitment includes focusing on institutional development, sustainable resource mobilization, and fundraising, as well as effective financial management and branch development. The ARC is enhancing communication capacities, establishing robust planning, monitoring, evaluation, and reporting systems, and reinforcing cooperation both internationally and domestically.

The ARC continues to prioritize harmonized Planning, Monitoring, Evaluation, and Reporting (PMER) standards and guidelines across its work, standardizing frameworks and ensuring PMER training for relevant staff and volunteers. These efforts contribute to strengthening PMER structures within the National Society and the broader Movement context.

Efforts are ongoing to establish new partnerships that provide alternative sources of capital and funding to achieve organizational goals and enhance financial stability. Significant attention is also given to improving financial accountability at both national and local levels, facilitating effective implementation of programmes and projects.

The ARC is developing strategies and systems to swiftly adapt to changing humanitarian contexts, including providing guidance on emergency preparedness and response. This enables the ARC to mobilize resources efficiently, activate response mechanisms promptly, and coordinate with stakeholders during emergencies.

Furthermore, with the support of the IFRC, the ARC is enhancing capacity building and training programmes to increase organizational agility and responsiveness. This includes workshops on disaster risk reduction, emergency healthcare, and community resilience, equipping the ARC with essential skills to tackle emerging challenges.

The ARC has participated in a joint intervention aimed at facilitating the development of region-specific key scenarios, particularly focusing on migration influx into countries of the CSEE. This collaborative effort involved refining main scenario assumptions, identifying locations, estimating potential caseloads, and corresponding National Societies response strategies. This initiative was facilitated by the IFRC CCD CSEE. The insights gained from this exercise have contributed to the finalization of the CSEE contingency plan and will be integrated into broader preparedness plans for National Societies in disaster response and RFL activities.

## Operational constraints – not for public versions

No major operational constraints have been identified in the reporting period.

## Risk management update

Risk	Likelihood	Impact	Mitigating actions
	Low/medium /high	Low/medium/ high	
Disaster events delay project implementation (Natural disaster occurrence).	high	high	Movement Contingency plan Involve non-Disaster Management staff in project from an early stage.
Limited staff and volunteer capacities especially in case of disaster events.  Frequent turnover of volunteers involved in the operation in the long-term.	medium	medium	1) Involvement of volunteer capacities of additional branches beyond the affected areas, focus on specific labor-intensive tasks. 2) Training of newly recruited volunteers (attracted in the early response phase of the disaster). 3) Hiring additional staff to compensate gaps (on a daily basis or short-term assignments).
Changes in political situation impede projects (Change of government, deterioration of economic situation) (low)	medium	low	Monitoring of the political situation. Keeping close contact with relevant political actors. Active advocacy.

## Monitoring and Evaluation framework

Regular monitoring and evaluation is being carried out by the responsible desk officers from the National Societies' HQ to follow the process of implementation of programmes and projects on national and local level. No evaluations have been conducted during the reporting period.