



Annual report 2024 WHO Country Office in Kyrgyzstan





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Abstract

In 2024, the WHO Country Office in Kyrgyzstan showcased adaptability and commitment to advancing health priorities under the “triple seven” Country Cooperation Strategy (2024–2030) (seven priority areas over seven years in all seven of Kyrgyzstan’s oblasts), the WHO European Programme of Work, 2020–2025 – “United Action for Better Health”, and WHO’s Thirteenth and Fourteenth Global Programmes of Work. By fostering partnerships with the Government of Kyrgyzstan, the Ministry of Health, United Nations agencies, development partners and donors, WHO actively supported evolving national health needs. Collaborative efforts extended across sectors and levels, reinforcing health and well-being nationwide. This annual report highlights the year’s key achievements and outlines the path forward to sustain and accelerate progress toward a healthier Kyrgyzstan.

Keywords

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Foreword

Throughout 2024, we advanced our mission to promote health and well-being, driven by the strategic priorities outlined in our “triple seven” Country Cooperation Strategy (seven priority areas over seven years in all seven of Kyrgyzstan’s oblasts) and harnessing WHO’s intellectual and social capital at all its levels.

A key achievement was the Central Asia International Health Investment Forum held in Bishkek in June. The Forum brought together over 200 participants, including 23 donors and partners to share best practices and to forge new partnerships and strengthen existing ones within the health sector. The Forum’s outcome statement commits countries and partners to the establishment of a health investment group that will meet regularly to guide progress on the *Roadmap for health and well-being in Central Asia (2022–2025)*.¹




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In 2024, Kyrgyzstan launched a multicentre study across 40 hospitals to derive nationally representative estimates of AMR prevalence and related health and economic burdens. Findings will underpin evidence-informed policies, strengthening the AMR response in the country and generating insights applicable across the region and globally.

Digital health transformation has been another key focus this past year. WHO, in collaboration with the United Nations (UN) Children’s Fund, the UN Population Fund and the UN Development Programme, launched a joint programme under the Sustainable Development Goal Digital Transformation initiative to bridge the digital health divide and promote the development of a more inclusive digital health ecosystem.

¹ Roadmap for health and well-being in Central Asia (2022–2025). Copenhagen: WHO Regional Office for Europe; 2022 (<https://iris.who.int/handle/10665/364330>). Licence: CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 IGO.



In partnership with the Ministry of Health, WHO also undertook a national health labour market analysis to assess the dynamics of the health workforce to optimize data flows, standardize health information systems and improve decision-making processes.

WHO supported the development of the National Action Plan for Health Security for 2024–2026, which was endorsed by the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Natural Resources and Ecology, and the Ministry of Water Resources and Agriculture. The plan serves as a platform for donor coordination and resource mobilization in the area of health security.

To improve pandemic preparedness and response through a One Health approach, the WHO Country Office in Kyrgyzstan, in collaboration with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN and the World Bank, has launched a regional pandemic fund project. The project aims to strengthen Kyrgyzstan's surveillance systems, laboratories and human resources, and to improve national and regional coordination. This initiative led to Kyrgyzstan's first-ever training on Crimean-Congo haemorrhagic fever, strengthening the nation's capacity to tackle emerging zoonotic diseases through a multisectoral framework.

Our commitment to tackling noncommunicable diseases (NCDs) remained unwavering. In collaboration with national authorities, WHO has been working to reduce salt consumption and eliminate trans fats – a very ambitious goal. Collaboration between WHO, the Ministry of Health and the World Diabetes Foundation has improved diabetes care, while the WHO Global Initiative for Childhood Cancer advanced paediatric oncology services showcased a holistic approach to health.

The WHO Country Office in Kyrgyzstan intensified efforts to combat infectious diseases, expanding immunization coverage to curb the measles outbreak and protect vulnerable populations. Technical support addressed health challenges in rural and mountainous areas, elevating these issues globally under the Health in the Mountains Agenda at the UN Climate Change Conference (COP29) in Baku, Azerbaijan.

We look to 2025 with hope, ready to build on these successes and to continue our joint efforts for a healthier Kyrgyzstan.

Dr Liviu Vedrasco,
WHO Representative to Kyrgyzstan





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Key donors

The WHO Country Office in Kyrgyzstan extends its gratitude to the following key partners and donors for their invaluable support and financial contributions:

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, United States of America
- Directorate-General for International Partnerships, European Commission
- Federal Ministry of Health, Germany
- Foundation for Innovative New Diagnostics, Switzerland
- Gates Foundation, United States of America
- GAVI, the Vaccine Alliance, Switzerland
- Ministry of Finance, Russian Federation
- Ministry of Finance, Saudi Arabia
- Pandemic Fund, United States of America
- St Jude Children's Research Hospital, United States of America
- Swiss Development Cooperation Agency, Switzerland
- United States Agency for International Development, United States of America
- Wellcome Trust, United Kingdom
- World Diabetes Foundation, Denmark

Abbreviations

AMR	antimicrobial resistance
CCHF	Crimean-Congo haemorrhagic fever
COP29	29th United Nations Climate Change Conference
COVID-19	coronavirus disease
DDPSSES	Department of Disease Prevention and State Sanitary and Epidemiological Surveillance
DTP	diphtheria, tetanus and pertussis
EQAAS	external quality assurance assessment scheme
EU	European Union
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
HLMA	health labour market analysis
HPV	human papillomavirus
HRH	human resources for health
ICD	International Classification of Diseases
ISO	International Organization for Standardization
NAPHS	National Action Plan for Health Security
NCD	noncommunicable disease
NITAG	National Immunization Technical Advisory Group
PCR	polymerase chain reaction
PCV3	pneumococcal conjugate vaccines
PHC	primary health care
Polio3	third dose poliomyelitis vaccine
SARS-CoV-2	severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SGBP	State Guaranteed Benefit Package
SPDI	Service Package Delivery and Implementation
TWG	technical working group
UHC	universal health coverage
UN	United Nations
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WDF	World Diabetes Foundation



Key highlights

- Hosted the first Central Asia International Health Investment Forum in Bishkek.
- Kyrgyzstan was selected by WHO from a pool of 13 candidate countries as the first to pilot a national survey assessing the health and economic burden of antimicrobial resistance (AMR) and has successfully launched it, involving 40 health-care facilities.
- Conducted a national health labour market analysis (HLMA) to assess the dynamics of the health workforce in the country.
- Endorsed the National Action Plan for Health Security (NAPHS) 2024–2026, with technical assistance from WHO.
- Three laboratory facilities in Bishkek and Osh have been accredited under the (International Organization for Standardization) ISO 15189 standard, which sets requirements for the quality and competence of medical laboratories.
- Launched the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) Digital Transformation Funding Window Joint Programme, led by WHO in partnership with the United Nations (UN) Children’s Fund, the UN Population Fund and the UN Development Programme.
- Started the Regional Pandemic Fund Project to tackle public health threats and food security challenges in Central Asia, focusing on the One Health approach.
- WHO and the Ministry of Health continued to respond to an ongoing measles epidemic in the country. As a result, 1.5 million vaccine doses were received from the Measles & Rubella Partnership and Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, with nearly 900 000 children vaccinated so far.
- At the September 2024 UN General Assembly in New York, during a meeting of the Friends of the UN Inter-Agency Task Force on noncommunicable disease (NCDs) and Mental Health, the Ministry of Health of Kyrgyzstan received a prestigious award for its outstanding efforts in combating NCDs.
- WHO and other partners provided technical support to address health challenges in rural and mountainous areas, successfully elevating these issues on the global stage through the Health in the Mountains Agenda at COP29 in Baku, Azerbaijan.

Key numbers



Nearly 900 000 children vaccinated against measles and rubella, contributing to strengthened immunization coverage.



1362 health-care workers trained in immunization, enhancing their skills to improve vaccination coverage.



Over 200 health-care workers and 119 nurses trained under a WHO and World Diabetes Foundation (WDF), strengthening care for diabetic retinopathy.



174 clinicians and laboratory specialists trained to undertake AMR surveys.



110 health-care workers trained in hepatitis B, hepatitis C and HIV risk factors, improving prevention, diagnosis and management.



54 laboratory physicians and virologists trained in bioinformatics and molecular phylogenetics for pathogen surveillance, quality management systems, and polymerase chain reaction (PCR) diagnostics of influenza and severe acute respiratory syndrome.



83 veterinary specialists and bacteriologists trained in AMR laboratory diagnostics.



61 epidemiologists, 39 parasitologists and 20 laboratory specialists trained in CCHF virus surveillance under the One Health approach.



45 epidemiologists and laboratory specialists trained in anthrax sampling, laboratory diagnosis and monitoring.



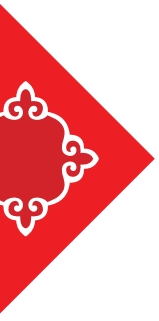
34 bacteriologists trained in validation and verification methods for brucellosis bacteriological research.



27 laboratory specialists trained in enzyme immunoassay diagnostics for infectious diseases, incorporating quality management elements.



19 epidemiologists trained through simulation exercises.



Pillar 1. Advancing seven strategic priority areas to build and sustain a better future for health and well-being by 2030

Strategic priority area 1: hypertension

The implementation plan for the strategic priority area on hypertension in Kyrgyzstan, developed in 2024 with WHO technical guidance, represents a milestone in the country's efforts to combat one of the leading causes of premature mortality. This plan successfully integrated civil society collaboration, leveraging the expertise of community organizations to amplify outreach and advocacy efforts. It also fostered partnerships with local governance structures, ensuring that interventions were tailored to the specific needs of communities and effectively implemented at grassroots level.



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Under the leadership of the Ministry of Health, this initiative focused on strengthening hypertension management, enhancing prevention strategies and raising awareness nationwide. Key components included the training of health-care professionals in updated hypertension protocols, expanding access to diagnostic and treatment services, and launching public health campaigns aimed at promoting healthy lifestyles and early detection.

Further bolstering this initiative was the adoption of the national plan on NCDs by the Government of Kyrgyzstan on 12 April 2024. This strategic document provides a unified framework for tackling NCDs, including hypertension, through an integrated and multisectoral approach. Together, these efforts signify Kyrgyzstan's commitment to reducing the NCD burden and achieving better health outcomes for its population.

Diabetes

A WHO and WDF project in Kyrgyzstan, which aims to tackle the growing burden of diabetes and its complications, concluded its impactful 3-year phase in 2024. During this period, the initiative trained over 200 health-care workers and 119 nurses, equipping them with specialized skills to deliver improved person-centred care. Essential equipment, including fundus cameras, ophthalmoscopes and glucose monitors, was provided to health facilities across the country, enhancing the quality of care for people living with diabetes.



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Diabetic retinopathy remains the leading cause of blindness among Kyrgyzstan's working-age population, where over 75 000 people live with diabetes. The incidence of diabetes has doubled in the past decade, emphasizing the urgent need for sustained action. New WHO data released on World Diabetes Day (14 November) highlighted the global scale of the diabetes epidemic, underscoring the critical importance of bridging treatment gaps.

The WHO–WDF initiative facilitated policy dialogues, workshops and international collaborations, fostering closer engagement among patients, health-care providers and policy-makers. These efforts have significantly advanced Kyrgyzstan’s national agenda for diabetes prevention and care.

Local authorities praised the project’s achievements, recognizing its contribution to safeguarding public health and addressing one of Kyrgyzstan’s most pressing health challenges. WHO and its partners reaffirm their commitment to supporting sustainable and equitable solutions for diabetes care in Kyrgyzstan.

A key milestone of the project was the introduction of Kyrgyzstan’s first laser equipment for treating diabetic retinopathy within the public health-care sector, enabling access to life-changing sight-saving treatment. In 2024, fundus cameras were distributed to pilot primary health care (PHC) facilities, allowing nurses to conduct diabetic retinopathy screening as part of a broader initiative to enhance early detection and prevention efforts.

The success of the initiative is attributed to the active involvement of key stakeholders, including people with diabetes, health-care workers, policy-makers and local governance (“akimiat”). Awareness campaigns and the engagement of patient organizations played a pivotal role in raising community awareness, while the strong managerial capacity demonstrated by PHC teams ensured effective implementation.

The project leaves a legacy of strengthened roles for nurses, heightened community awareness and well-coordinated local collaboration. It also exemplifies the transformative potential of multisectoral action and the importance of trust and empowerment in achieving sustainable health outcomes (see Box 1).



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Box 1. Field story: a journey from darkness to vision

Burul Arzymatova, a dedicated teacher, has always been passionate about educating the young minds of her community. At 64 years old, she experienced her vision being limited by age and further challenged by diabetic retinopathy, a condition she had battled for the past 20 years.

Diabetic retinopathy is a relentless adversary, causing vision loss and blindness. For Burul, this meant a constant struggle with her deteriorating vision, which impacted not only her personal life, but also her ability to teach effectively.

However, hope appeared on the horizon when she was among the first people selected to receive free treatment from the Ministry of Health as part of a project by WHO and WDF in Kyrgyzstan. This initiative aims to improve NCD prevention and control, focusing specifically on diabetes care and preventing complications from the disease.

Over the last 18 months, there has been a concerted effort to improve diabetic retinopathy screening and treatment through the project. A new model was defined, equipment was procured and training was initiated, culminating in a visit from international experts who provided training sessions, quality assessments and practical workshops focusing on laser treatment, grading and screening. Throughout this process, the Chui Diabetes Society played a key role in engaging people with diabetes.

Burul's treatment, made possible by the Ministry of Health's acquisition of the state's first-ever laser equipment for diabetic retinopathy via the WHO-WDF project, was a turning point in her life. It gave her renewed hope for clearer vision and a brighter future. Moreover, WHO and WDF provided training for nurses and ophthalmologists to enable other people to benefit in the same way.



Strategic priority area 2: health emergency prevention, preparedness, response and resilience

In 2024, Kyrgyzstan achieved a milestone in health security with the signing of the NAPHS by key ministries, including health, natural resources and ecology, and water resources and agriculture. Rooted in the WHO Joint External Evaluation, the NAPHS provides a comprehensive roadmap for strengthening health security across 12 technical areas, such as infection prevention, zoonotic diseases and risk communication. This plan was developed collaboratively with national and international experts, receiving technical support from WHO.



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To further enhance health emergency preparedness, WHO and partners launched two projects: the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) Global Health Security programme and the World Bank Pandemic Fund initiative under the One Health approach. The Global Health Security and Pandemic Preparedness initiatives, a joint effort involving the Kyrgyz government, WHO, USAID, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the UN and other partners, focused on addressing AMR, monitoring zoonotic diseases, strengthening laboratory systems and enhancing workforce capacity. This initiative fosters collaboration among ministries and stakeholders to comprehensively address health security challenges.

A 2-week mission in June 2024 assessed Kyrgyzstan's AMR surveillance system across human, animal and environmental sectors. WHO, the FAO and local authorities reviewed the AMR Action Plan (2022–2025), identifying areas for improvement. Over 100 laboratory specialists received AMR-focused training and a manual on infection prevention and control was developed to support efforts in curbing AMR in health-care settings.

In April 2024, WHO also facilitated an intra-action review of the health system's response to a measles outbreak, engaging more than 50 experts to assess and strengthen response strategies. Around the same time, a simulation exercise at Manas International Airport tested Kyrgyzstan's preparedness for a potential cholera case. Supported by USAID, the exercise evaluated existing protocols for managing suspected infectious disease cases upon aircraft arrival and highlighted areas for improvement. This exercise was comprehensive, covering various stages from pre-landing preparations to managing passengers and patients.

Training initiatives continued with a focus on zoonotic diseases. In June 2024, WHO led a training programme on CCHF in Bishkek and Osh, emphasizing its epidemiology, diagnosis, treatment and control. The training brought together a multidisciplinary team of professionals, including doctors, veterinarians, epidemiologists, entomologists and virologists. Participants engaged in practical sessions, such as tick collection demonstrations in the Chui and Osh regions, to enhance disease management capabilities. The programme, organized by the WHO Country Office in Kyrgyzstan and funded through the Pandemic Fund, underscored the importance of the One Health approach in integrating efforts across human, animal and environmental health sectors.

To strengthen multisectoral surveillance, WHO, with support from the Pandemic Fund, facilitated the development of essential tools, including a digital map of anthrax burial sites, an electronic notification form and an integrated laboratory information system connecting the health and agriculture ministries. A training module for diagnosing and monitoring zoonotic diseases, such as echinococcosis and CCHF, was also integrated into medical training programmes.

In July 2024, over 40 participants attended a comprehensive training event on anthrax surveillance, addressing sampling, testing, reporting and early warning systems. Supported by USAID's Global Health Security programme, the training highlighted interagency collaboration to enhance rapid response capabilities.

Further advancing the One Health approach, a series of training-of-trainer sessions in October and November 2024 engaged 300 trainers across 10 districts in Batken, Osh and Jalal-Abad provinces. Conducted by the Republican Centre for Health Promotion and Mass Communications and other health authorities, with WHO support, the sessions focused on raising awareness of zoonotic diseases like brucellosis, anthrax, rabies and echinococcosis. These efforts aimed to create a cascade effect of knowledge transfer, particularly among farmers and rural communities in marginalized areas with limited health-care access. This initiative, funded by the Pandemic Fund, emphasized the prevention of zoonotic diseases.

In May 2024, WHO initiated the establishment of national emergency medical teams in Kyrgyzstan. Discussions with the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Emergency Situations laid the foundation for enhanced health emergency preparedness and response capabilities. Collectively, these initiatives reflect Kyrgyzstan's strong commitment to bolstering health security and emergency preparedness, supported by WHO and its partners.

Strengthening laboratories

In 2024, Kyrgyzstan made significant progress in strengthening its laboratory systems, aligned with the Country Cooperation Strategy (2024–2030) and supported by the World Bank's Pandemic Fund under the One Health approach to preparing and responding to pandemics. A key achievement was the accreditation of three laboratory facilities in Bishkek and Osh cities, which successfully met the ISO15189 standard.



The Coordination Laboratory Council initiated the development of a comprehensive national laboratory policy and strategy. This effort builds on lessons learned from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, during which the national health-care system, in collaboration with global partners, gained invaluable experience in laboratory service development. With technical support from the WHO Country Office in Kyrgyzstan, laboratory experts revised the national laboratory policy, developed an action plan for improving laboratory services for 2025 and conducted a detailed budget costing for implementation.

Activities to improve laboratory testing quality management, including the implementation of external quality assurance assessment schemes (EQAASs), were prioritized. EQAASs ensure the accuracy of test results by evaluating the entire testing process, from sample receipt to results reporting. With WHO support, the Republican Research Production Centre for Quality of Infectious Diseases Diagnostics, under the Ministry of Health, developed reference panels of control samples for severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) RNA by PCR, influenza A and B RNA by PCR, brucellosis and tick-borne encephalitis. These tools were used in professional testing methods and on-site assessments to improve diagnostic accuracy.

Under the One Health framework, 18 public health laboratory specialists and 9 veterinary experts were trained in immunoenzyme analysis, emphasizing quality assurance and quality control. This training enhanced the diagnostic capacity of public health and veterinary laboratories for infectious diseases.

In October 2024, 14 laboratory professionals from public health, HIV and tuberculosis services across Kyrgyzstan participated in an intensive 3-day training event on next-generation sequencing, bioinformatics and molecular epidemiology, focusing on the SARS-CoV-2 and other high-risk pathogens. This effort, part of a pandemic influenza preparedness project, aims to strengthen genomic surveillance, enabling the country to identify emerging pathogens and respond to public health challenges more effectively.

Through a collaboration with the FAO, WHO, the World Organisation for Animal Health, the European Centre for Disease Control, the Centers for Disease Prevention and Control and the Association of Public Health Laboratories, the Global Laboratory Leadership Programme was introduced last year to strengthen laboratory leadership. The second phase of training has seen 15 laboratory managers in Kyrgyzstan qualify, with plans to train 11 mentors in the coming years (Box 2).

Box 2. Field story: better laboratories as a bridge to a stronger health system

Dr Baltabaeva is one of 96 laboratory specialists who had been trained by WHO in the diagnosis of Coronavirus disease (COVID-19). The training involved local PCR method experts from the National Tuberculosis Centre, AIDS centres, the Republican Centre for Quarantine and Especially Dangerous Infections, state centres for sanitary and epidemiological surveillance in Bishkek and the Jalal-Abad, Osh and Issyk-Kul regions, and private laboratories.

The training was developed to equip laboratory specialists with basic skills for the diagnosis of COVID-19. Dr Baltabaeva, together with her colleagues, also received face-to-face training in biosafety in laboratory settings and in working with high-threat pathogens and dangerous materials, as well as training in safe collection, transportation, processing and preparation of samples for further testing.



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As Dr Baltabaeva states, “I deepened my knowledge and laboratory experience through this training. It covered a lot of practical skills, which was extremely helpful.”

We’ve been working around the clock during this pandemic to meet testing requirements and accomplish our mission – and we’re still doing it, she continues. We realize that COVID-19 will stay with us a long time. At the same time, the knowledge and skills received through the WHO training will stay with us forever. Of course, we will continue to sharpen our knowledge and skills because we always have to be ready for new threats.

Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, WHO has successfully trained over 500 health workers from intensive care units, the Republican Clinical Infectious Diseases Hospital, PHC centres and 2 military hospitals in the clinical management of COVID-19 patients. The improved capacities of health workers, along with the supplies and equipment provided to hospitals and isolation centres, helped to ensure the provision of appropriate clinical care for patients and a safe environment at health facilities for all during the COVID-19 pandemic.

In addition, WHO continues to provide the Ministry of Health and technical experts with updated evidence, recommendations and WHO guidelines on prevention, laboratory diagnosis and treatment of COVID-19 and other high-threat pathogens.

Dr Baltabaeva remembers that early in the COVID-19 pandemic SARS-CoV-2 variants had begun emerging in countries around the world, but laboratories in Kyrgyzstan were not able to determine whether any of them were circulating locally. WHO assisted by sending samples to international WHO reference laboratories for sequencing. Although at first this made it difficult to monitor the epidemiological situation in real time, genomic sequencing capabilities were established in the country thanks to WHO and other partners. This was a notable public health success.

Humanitarian aid initiatives

In 2024, the WHO Country Office in Kyrgyzstan further demonstrated its commitment to strengthening the health-care system through a series of humanitarian aid initiatives.

In March, the Country Office donated emergency medical care kits to the Department of Disaster Medicine and Emergency Advisory Medical Care at the National Hospital, under the Ministry of Health of Kyrgyzstan. These supplies, valued at over US\$ 37 000 and weighing more than 240 kg, were shipped from the WHO regional logistics hub in Dubai. The kits included essential medical supplies such as sutures, anaesthesia materials, surgical drains, sterilization and intubation kits, general surgery kits and other vital items. Designed to provide care for injuries and surgical pathologies in field conditions for over 100 people, the donation was officially handed over at a ceremony attended by National Hospital leaders and WHO staff.



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Building on this support, in August, the WHO Country Office provided 435 000 albendazole tablets (400 mg each) to the Department of Disease Prevention and State Sanitary and Epidemiological Surveillance (DDPSSES) under the Ministry of Health. These tablets are critical for treating patients with cystic and alveolar echinococcosis, a serious parasitic infection caused by *Echinococcus granulosus*. The disease, often transmitted through contact with domestic dogs and livestock, can be mitigated by regular deworming of animals and good personal hygiene practices, such as frequent handwashing. Official data from the DDPSSES reveal that Kyrgyzstan registers 800 to 1500 cases of echinococcosis annually, with up to 200 involving alveolar echinococcosis. Children and young adults, who make up 58–65% of surgical patients, are particularly vulnerable. The recurrence rate of the disease after surgery stands at 32–38%, with a mortality rate ranging from 2–6%. The albendazole tablets will be distributed to health-care facilities across the country, with the aim of improving treatment outcomes for those affected.



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In December, the WHO Country Office continued its support by donating reagents and consumables to the DDPSES for conducting 1700 tests for the early detection of the mpox virus using the PCR method. The consumables included disposable medical shoe covers, gowns, gloves, caps, test tubes and other necessary items. This donation, valued at more than US\$ 20 000, was provided under the World Bank Pandemic Fund's programme for preparing and responding to pandemics using the One Health approach. In the same month, laboratory equipment worth US\$ 83 528 was procured under the Pandemic Fund for three key agencies within the Ministry of Health: the National Institute of Public Health, the Centre for State Sanitary and Epidemiological Surveillance in Bishkek, and the Osh City Centre for Disease Prevention and State Sanitary and Epidemiological Surveillance.



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In addition to these efforts, the WHO Country Office in Kyrgyzstan, responding to a request from the Ministry of Health, initiated a preventive maintenance programme to certify and maintain essential laboratory equipment. This programme included: i) the certification and repair of 63 biological safety cabinets in accordance with ISO 14644-1:1999 standard for air cleanliness and ISO 1822-1:2010 standard for high-efficiency air filters; and ii) the calibration and certification of 12 real-time PCR machines by authorized engineers, ensuring compliance with ISO 12469 standards. These actions addressed critical gaps, as most biosafety cabinets and real-time PCR machines in Kyrgyzstan had not been calibrated or certified, posing significant risks when working with pathogens.

Strategic priority area 3: mental health

To mark World Mental Health Day, WHO Country Office in Kyrgyzstan, in partnership with the Ministry of Health and public health associations, hosted a roundtable on the country's pressing mental health challenges. Discussions focused on the need for better psychiatric care for children and adolescents, identifying barriers to mental health services and proposing solutions to prevent long-term issues in adulthood and work.



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Eleven percent of Kyrgyzstan's population suffers from mental disorders and bullying affects nearly one third of adolescents in Kyrgyzstan, impacting their physical and mental health and leading to low engagement in learning, anxiety, post-traumatic stress and lack of self-esteem.

Roundtable participants also addressed the theme of World Mental Health Day, "Mental health at work", highlighting the growing need for workplace mental health support, with 15% of working-age adults estimated to have a mental disorder in 2019. Globally, depression and anxiety result in the loss of approximately 12 billion working days annually, costing the economy around US\$ 1 trillion in lost productivity each year.

Strategic priority area 4: AMR

In June 2024, the piloting of the national prevalence study on the health and economic burden of antimicrobial resistance (AMR) in human bacterial bloodstream infections officially began, an initiative spearheaded by WHO. The pilot demonstrates the commitment of the Government of Kyrgyzstan to addressing AMR through innovative approaches that generate robust and comparable evidence across settings. This initiative can serve as a model to inform similar efforts in other low- and middle-income countries (LMICs).



The primary goal of this survey is to enhance Kyrgyzstan's capacity for AMR surveillance and to accelerate the availability of high-quality, representative AMR data to inform both national policies and global trends. The focus is on determining the prevalence of AMR in human bloodstream infections among individuals receiving acute inpatient care. Additionally, laboratory results from the survey are being applied directly to daily clinical interventions, improving the effectiveness and precision of patient care.

The launch event in Bishkek in June 2024 was attended by ministers, parliament members, development partners, foreign embassies, various ministries and agencies, health-care workers, WHO experts and professional association representatives. WHO contributed over US\$ 300 000 in equipment and diagnostic tools to support the survey and provided extensive training to personnel from 40 hospitals across Kyrgyzstan, as well as staff from 3 central reference laboratories and their affiliated institutions, ensuring the survey's success.

Strategic priority area 5: climate resilience and chemical safety

In November 2024, during COP29 in Baku, Azerbaijan, the thematic event Health of the Population of Mountain Regions in the Context of Climate Change: Problems and Solutions was convened. Organized by the Ministry of Health of Kyrgyzstan in collaboration with WHO and development partners, the event provided a critical platform for addressing the intersection of climate change and public health in mountain regions. Dr Hans Kluge, Regional Director for the WHO European Region, visited Kyrgyzstan's health pavilion during COP29 and met with the Kyrgyz delegation led by Edil Baisalov, Deputy Prime Minister of Kyrgyzstan.



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With 94% of Kyrgyzstan's territory situated above 1500 metres, the country faces unique public health challenges. Climate change has exacerbated existing health risks, increasing the frequency of extreme weather events such as droughts, floods and sudden temperature fluctuations. These changes have a direct impact on vulnerable populations, particularly children, the elderly and pregnant women. One of the most pressing health concerns is high-altitude pulmonary hypertension, which affects 14–20% of residents. Additionally, climate change contributes to rising rates of nutrient deficiencies and micronutrient-related diseases, necessitating urgent adaptation measures within the health sector.

WHO continues to advocate for investment in strengthening health systems, adaptation strategies and mitigation measures. WHO has been instrumental in supporting the government's efforts to enhance PHC services, expand telemedicine programmes and deploy mobile medical teams to improve health-care access in remote areas. WHO also assists in improving diagnostic and early warning systems, as well as implementing innovative disease-prevention strategies to address emerging climate-related health threats.

Strategic priority area 6: human resources for health (HRH)

Kyrgyzstan's health sector faces substantial workforce challenges, particularly at primary health care (PHC) level. These include uneven workforce distribution across regions, low salaries, adverse working conditions, high migration rates and difficulties in attracting and retaining health-care professionals. Family doctors face particularly low professional prestige, exacerbating these issues within an ageing workforce. Additionally, reforms in nursing and midwifery necessitate changes in training, education and PHC organizational structures.

To address these challenges, a comprehensive HLMA was conducted in 2024. This provided a detailed mapping of data, stakeholders and policies related to human resources for health (HRH) in Kyrgyzstan. The findings identified key shortcomings and outlined actionable steps to address them, focusing on rural family doctors and nurses who play a critical role in delivering PHC services. The analysis will inform the development of a strategic HRH document and corresponding policy dialogues in 2025, aligning with national health system objectives.

The Ministry of Health established a technical working group (TWG) to oversee the HLMA. Comprised of 14 senior officials representing diverse sectors – health administration, medical education, professional associations, nursing and statistics—the TWG is led by the First Deputy Minister of Health. Between March and December 2024, the TWG conducted a thorough assessment of Kyrgyzstan's health workforce, ensuring a multisectoral and inclusive approach.

To strengthen HRH leadership, Kyrgyz representatives participated in the third Executive Course on Health Workforce Leadership and Management in November 2024. Organized by WHO Regional Office for Europe, Health Workforce and Service Development team in Samarkand, Uzbekistan, the course addressed Central Asia's specific needs. It supported implementation of the *Framework for action on the health and care workforce in the WHO European Region 2023–2030*² and equipped Kyrgyz health leaders with insights to advance workforce strategies.

In May 2024, Kyrgyzstan contributed to presenting the Central Asia Subregional Cooperation Action Plan on Nursing and Midwifery at the Geneva Health Forum. Covering 2024–2030, the Action Plan serves as a strategic framework for strengthening nursing and midwifery across Central Asia. It identifies collaboration areas with the WHO European Region and engagement opportunities with international donors and partners. The Plan builds on 2 years of subregional policy dialogues held in Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, guided by the government chief nursing and midwifery officers of five Central Asian countries. This strengths-based initiative aims to accelerate nursing and midwifery development in the region.

² Seventy-third Regional Committee for Europe, Astana, Kazakhstan, 24–26 October 2023: framework for action on the health and care workforce in the WHO European Region 2023–2030. WHO Regional Office for Europe; 2023 (EUR/RC73/8; <https://iris.who.int/handle/10665/373730>).



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Box 3 describes some of the challenges facing the country's health-care workers and how teamwork helped one doctor to overcome them.

Box 3. Field story: Jyldyz's passion for health care endures despite obstacles

Jyldyz Beishenova has dedicated her life to serving the people of Bakai-Ata village in the Talas region of Kyrgyzstan as a family doctor at Family Medicine Centre No. 1. Despite the challenges, including a modest salary and demanding workload, she continues to work with the same passion she had as a young woman who dreamt of becoming a health-care worker.

"I always knew I wanted to help people," she recalls. "Since my school days, it has been my dream to become a health-care worker. I love what I do, even if the salary is low. It's my calling."

Kyrgyzstan, like many countries in the WHO European Region, is grappling with a critical shortage of health-care workers. While efforts have been made to increase the number of certified family doctors, the current level is still only half of the recommended ratio. Furthermore, the number of doctors per 10 000 population has decreased by 20% and the number of nurses has declined by 11% since 2010, and now over 50% of the family doctors in place are at or past retirement age.

To address this, WHO in Kyrgyzstan has identified HRH as one of seven strategic priority areas in its Country Cooperation Strategy with the Ministry of Health for 2024–2030. The Strategy focuses on expanding training and retention programmes for health-care workers, improving working conditions and promoting gender equity in leadership roles within the sector, with a strong focus at the PHC level and on rural and mountainous areas.



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Jyldyz's daily shift begins at 08:00 and she provides care for patients with a wide range of health needs, from routine check-ups to managing chronic illnesses like diabetes and hypertension. Her patients vary in age, background and medical conditions but Jyldyz takes the time to listen to each one, ensuring that they feel heard and understood.

She provides not only medical treatment but also emotional support, often offering advice on how to live healthier lives. Whether it's educating young mothers on proper nutrition for their children, counselling elderly patients on managing their medications, or assisting with vaccinations and preventive care, Jyldyz's role is essential to her patients' well-being and she is a trusted figure in her community.

However, Jyldyz knows that she cannot do her work alone. She is part of a team that includes nurses, midwives and other health-care workers, each contributing to patient care. She also works alongside the village health committee, which is a vital link between health-care services and the community, helping to promote health education and disease prevention efforts.

"We all play a role in the health of our community," she says. "I rely on my team for support and we work closely to ensure that our patients receive the best care possible."

Jyldyz is a testament to the resilience and dedication of Kyrgyzstan's health-care workers. On any given day, they help between 12 and 30 people, attending to everything from acute illnesses to long-term health management. In a region where health-care professionals are scarce, Jyldyz's presence is a lifeline, particularly for those who cannot easily access care in larger cities.

Strategic priority area 7: data, digital health and delivery for impact

In 2024, Kyrgyzstan achieved progress in advancing digital health through comprehensive capacity-building efforts, international collaborations and targeted training programmes. These efforts focused on enhancing the digital health capabilities of the Ministry of Health and key stakeholders.

In March 2024, a WHO mid-term evaluation mission assessed progress in developing the national vaccination information system, iEmdoo. As of 2024, all personal vaccination data have been entered at the PHC level. The system was introduced in maternity hospitals in Bishkek in January 2024, and in May 2024 a personalized notification service for upcoming vaccinations was launched. While progress has been notable, further technical assistance is required to enhance the iEmdoo system.

June 2024 saw active engagement in high-profile events, including the Informatics for Leaders High-level Summit on Digital Health Transformation in Istanbul. Stakeholders, including representatives from the Presidential Administration, the Ministry of Digital Development, the Ministry of Health, the e-Health Centre and other national institutions, exchanged best practices and discussed trends in digital health.

In July, a specialized training course was held in Germany to further support the digitalization of health information systems across Central Asia. Participants gained practical skills in integrating digital technologies into health-care systems, covering critical topics such as digital health system integration and data management. Interactive discussions and hands-on exercises provided comprehensive knowledge and skills to advance health-care digitalization effectively in their countries.

Training programmes targeted senior health policy decision-makers and technical personnel to enhance leadership in managing digital health initiatives. These programmes provided insights into best practices for digital health management and technology integration.

In September 2024, Kyrgyz delegates attended a training in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, focusing on Health Level 7 Fast Healthcare Interoperability Resources standards. Supported by the European Union (EU) through CARINFONET, the Central Asian Republics Information Network, the programme addressed interoperability challenges within Central Asia's digital health ecosystems. Participants from Kyrgyzstan and neighbouring countries gained practical insights into health-care data exchange, fostering regional cooperation and knowledge-sharing.

October 2024 marked the launch of the UN's joint programme to bridge the digital health divide in Kyrgyzstan, a comprehensive initiative with a budget of US\$ 4.03 million. Funded by the UN Joint SDG Fund and contributions from the EU, Spain and Sweden, the programme aims to modernize health services and expand access to telemedicine.



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Key objectives include upgrading digital health infrastructure, linking 60 health facilities to the national electronic health record platform and creating a digital health profile for citizens to securely access vaccination records and other health data. This ambitious project is led by WHO in collaboration with the UN Development Programme, the UN Children’s Fund, the UN Population Fund and multiple government ministries.

Finally, in December 2024 a workshop in Almaty, Kazakhstan, funded by the EU under the Central Asia COVID-19 Crisis Response Programme – Phase 2, prepared Central Asian countries for the transition from International Classification of Diseases (ICD) to ICD-11. Participants learned strategies for integrating ICD-11 into existing systems and enhancing health data quality. This workshop underscored the region’s collective efforts to adopt international standards and improve health-care outcomes.

Box 4 describes how digital health is being used to help parents keep track of their child’s immunization record.



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Box 4. Field story: digital health care

Meerim Baktybek, 33, a mother in Bishkek and a procurement specialist, shared how the Tunduk mobile app, which integrates the iEmdoo immunization management system, has made her life easier.

All my three children's vaccination records are kept on my phone, so I never have to worry about missing an appointment or losing important documents. The e-gov mobile app sends me reminders for upcoming vaccinations and provides detailed information about each vaccine. It's reassuring to know that my children's health is being monitored and managed efficiently, giving me peace of mind and more time to focus on my family.

iEmdoo, a digital vaccination information system, was introduced in Kyrgyzstan as part of the Sanarip MED digital health ecosystem, a broader effort to modernize the country's health-care infrastructure. Developed with the support of the EU and WHO, iEmdoo generates a digital vaccination card for newborns at maternity hospitals, which grows with the child. This means that every vaccination, exemption and medical note is captured in real-time and can be accessed easily through the Tunduk e-gov mobile app.

For parents like Meerim, this system eliminates the stress of managing paper records and ensures that children receive their vaccinations on time. "I no longer have to keep track of paper cards or remember vaccination dates," she explained. "The app does that for me and sends reminders, so I don't miss anything."

The system is a significant leap in digital health care, making vaccination records more accessible, accurate and easier to manage. With the iEmdoo system, families can stay on top of their children's health needs while enjoying the reassurance that every step is taken for their well-being.

Regular WHO evaluations confirmed the success of the iEmdoo system, now operational in maternity hospitals in Bishkek. The introduction of personalized notifications for upcoming vaccinations is helping families stay informed, though the system, which is under ongoing development, still requires technical enhancements to reach its full potential.


Pillar 2. Unwavering commitment to our unfinished agenda on strengthening PHC and improving access to high-impact interventions

PHC and health financing

In collaboration with the World Bank, WHO provided the Ministry of Health's TWGs on PHC with specialized training on the WHO Universal Health Coverage (UHC) Compendium for Service Package Delivery and Implementation. This initiative aimed to support evidence-informed revisions of the State Guaranteed Benefit Package (SGBP). During the training, the TWGs successfully mapped health services across the system to create a comprehensive list of health interventions for potential inclusion in the updated SGBP. They also identified a set of decision criteria to guide the SGBP's design and future priority-setting processes.



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In 2024, the initial results of the costing of PHC services were presented to the Ministry of Health and the Mandatory Health Insurance Fund working group. These findings highlighted several issues, data gaps and limitations in the current system, while also offering solutions to establish a routine process for regular costing exercises. The suggested process is designed to account for inflation, rising commodity prices and changes in clinical practices, norms and standards. In response to the Ministry of Health's request, a training on PHC costing methodology is planned, with an official handover scheduled for 2025.

In 2024, the Government of Kyrgyzstan launched structural health financing reforms aimed at improving the performance of the health-care system and streamlining the financing of health organizations. WHO applied a comprehensive approach to promote evidence-based, informed decision-making in addressing health system performance challenges (see Box 5). This included advocating for the negotiation and better coordination of proposed reforms, deploying a high-level mission from the WHO Regional Office for Europe and building the capacity of key decision-makers in the health financing system. In this context, eight participants from the President's Administration, the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Health, the Mandatory Health Insurance Fund and family medicine centres attended the WHO Barcelona Office for Health Systems Financing course on health financing for UHC for Central Asia countries. The course, held in Almaty, Kazakhstan, in October 2024, aimed to equip policy-makers with the knowledge and skills necessary to improve health system financing and advance UHC, with a particular focus on PHC.

Box 5. Field story: transforming the lives of citizens like Ymyt Berdibekova

Ymyt Berdibekova, a 66-year-old pensioner from Bishkek, is saving an estimated 10% of her spending on hypertension medicines thanks to a new initiative of the Ministry of Health of Kyrgyzstan.

Ymyt has been struggling with hypertension for 36 years and must take medicine twice daily. She used to spend half of her monthly pension on her treatment, and she worked in a local shop to earn extra money as she could not meet her basic needs. In 2023, life became easier for her and many others because, for the first time in Kyrgyzstan, prices of selected medicines were regulated, making them more affordable and accessible to the population.

In May 2023, a government decree introduced price controls for all imported medicines included in the country's list of essential medicines, including several medicines used to address the burden of NCDs such as hypertension. The price control mechanism has reduced the cost of medicines for hypertension for around 420 000 people in Kyrgyzstan.



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Although this change has had a positive impact for Kyrgyzstan's population, progress is under threat following the recent removal of medicines from the value added tax exemption list. The introduction of a value added tax on medicines, including those on the country's list of essential medicines, may offset the financial benefits of the price control mechanism for people such as Ymyt. While other benefits of the price control mechanism remain, such as ensuring the availability of lower-priced medicines when people need them, constant vigilance and advocacy are needed to ensure that the population is better protected from financial hardship.

Across the WHO European Region, financial hardship is largely driven by out-of-pocket payments for outpatient medicines, medical products and dental care – services that are commonly delivered or managed in primary care settings – indicating significant gaps in the coverage of primary care in many countries. For this reason, WHO suggests that countries consider exempting essential medicines from taxation and that this is coupled with measures to ensure that the policy results in lower prices of medicines to patients and purchasers.

With support from the UHC Partnership since 2018, WHO has worked closely with Kyrgyzstan's Ministry of Health to improve the affordability of medicines for people living with NCDs. This is critical for ensuring that people do not experience financial hardship due to accessing health care, a fundamental element of UHC.

The UHC Partnership operates in over 125 countries, representing over 3 billion people. It is supported and funded by Belgium, Canada, the EU, France, Germany, Ireland, Luxembourg, Japan, the United Kingdom, and WHO.

Immunization

In 2024, Kyrgyzstan's immunization programme faced significant challenges but saw notable achievements. WHO continues to support the country's efforts to protect its population from vaccine-preventable diseases. While the national immunization programme has long been a cornerstone of public health, disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in a decline in vaccination coverage. According to the Multiple indicator cluster survey 2023, survey findings report,³ coverage for diphtheria, tetanus and pertussis vaccine (DTP3), third dose of poliomyelitis vaccine (Polio3) and third dose of pneumococcal conjugate vaccines (PCV3) dropped to 82%, 83% and 83% respectively compared to the period before the COVID-19 pandemic (95%, 96% and 96% in 2019, respectively), highlighting the pressing need to address gaps in vaccine uptake.



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To counter these setbacks, Kyrgyzstan successfully applied for support from the Gavi Big Catch-up campaign. This initiative aims to vaccinate children born between 2019 and 2022 who missed or partially completed their scheduled vaccinations during the pandemic. The campaign secured essential vaccine doses and operational funding to target multiple antigens, including pentavalent vaccine (against diphtheria, pertussis, tetanus, hepatitis B and Haemophilus influenzae type b), bivalent oral polio vaccine, inactivated polio vaccine, pneumococcal conjugate vaccine and rotaviral vaccine. Implementation is planned for 2025, with the goal of closing immunization gaps and reaching children with zero doses of the targeted vaccines.

³ Kyrgyz Republic multiple indicator cluster survey 2023, survey findings report. Bishkek: National Statistical Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic and UNICEF; 2024 (https://mics.unicef.org/sites/mics/files/2024-10/Kyrgyzstan%202023%20MICS_English.pdf).

In parallel, Kyrgyzstan has been grappling with a measles outbreak that began in early 2023 and quickly spread across all regions of the country. In response, the Kyrgyz government, with WHO's technical support, organized several large-scale supplementary immunization activities. The first two rounds, conducted in 2023 and 2024, targeted children aged 9–84 months in regions such as Bishkek, Osh, Chui, Talas, Issyk-Kul, Naryn and Batken, achieving a vaccination uptake of 84%. A third round in 2024, funded by the government and covering Jalal-Abad, achieved an 88% uptake. A fourth round, supported by Gavi and launched in October 2024, is ongoing, with vaccination coverage reaching 74% by 11 December 2024. These efforts reflect the government's commitment to controlling the outbreak and ensuring broader immunization coverage.

The human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccination was successfully introduced in 2022 with a two-dose schedule for 11-year-old girls. In March 2024, the vaccination schedule was updated to a single-dose regimen. As of December 2024, a total of 275 117 girls aged 11–14 years have been vaccinated against HPV, representing 71.4% of the target population.

WHO has also provided crucial support to the National Immunization Technical Advisory Group (NITAG), enabling significant policy changes in 2024. Based on NITAG's recommendations, the measles vaccination schedule was revised from 6 years to 2 years of age, and the two-dose HPV vaccination was replaced with a single-dose schedule to enhance accessibility and coverage.

In June 2024, WHO facilitated the annual joint appraisal, an integral part of Gavi's performance monitoring framework. This multistakeholder review allowed for a comprehensive assessment of routine immunization progress, challenges and strategies to reach zero-dose children and underserved communities. The joint appraisal emphasized the importance of optimizing immunization efforts to align with national goals and targets.

Strengthening vaccine safety surveillance remained a priority in 2024. With WHO's technical guidance, Kyrgyzstan made significant progress in reporting adverse events following immunization to the WHO safety databases, VigiFlow and VigiBase. Since 2023, the country has reported 2504 cases, showcasing its growing capacity to monitor and respond to vaccine safety issues.

Preparations for the construction of a national vaccine warehouse also advanced in 2024, with WHO providing guidance on the storage and transportation of time- and temperature-sensitive pharmaceutical products. Preliminary calculations and recommendations for the facility's design were shared to support this critical infrastructure project.

Kyrgyzstan's immunization efforts in 2024 underscore the resilience and commitment of its health system, bolstered by the technical and strategic support of WHO. Through concerted actions to address challenges, close immunization gaps and innovate in vaccine delivery, the country is making significant strides towards protecting its population and achieving its immunization targets.

Box 6 acknowledges the commitment of those who dedicate themselves to the well-being of their communities through vaccination.




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Box 6. Field story: guardian of health in the mountains

In the remote, rugged landscapes of Naryn, Kyrgyzstan, where access to health care is often a journey in itself, a dedicated figure stands tall amidst the challenges. Meet Jiydekul Yrysbayeva, a beacon of hope and resilience in a region where medical services are sparse and facilities often distant.

Jiydekul is a feldsher who lives in the Karatal Japyryk area of Naryn, which is 2500 metres above sea level in the most mountainous region of the country. Despite the logistical hurdles of reaching this inaccessible part of Kyrgyzstan, Jiydekul tirelessly dedicates herself to the well-being of her community and embodies the spirit of service and compassion.



Part-time medical worker, part-time livestock farmer and full-time advocate for health, Jydekul's mission extends beyond the confines of her medical station. With a particular focus on vaccination, she plays a crucial role in safeguarding the lives of her fellow Kyrgyz. Through her efforts, she not only administers vaccines, but also educates her community about the importance of immunization.

The year 2024 marked 30 years since the start of Kyrgyzstan's national immunization programme. With support from WHO and other allies, this huge public health initiative has saved countless lives and protected future generations against preventable diseases. For over 50 years, WHO's Expanded Programme on Immunization has been a cornerstone of health protection in the WHO European Region, of which Kyrgyzstan is a part.

Jydekul and her peers, through their steadfast commitment and dedication, combined with the power of vaccines, not only save lives but also lay the foundation for a healthier, more resilient future for Kyrgyzstan and beyond.

HIV/AIDS and tuberculosis

WHO is supporting implementation of the population-based serosurvey of prevalence and risk factors for hepatitis B and hepatitis C virus infection and HIV. Kyrgyzstan is also supported in the development of differentiated and simplified HIV pre-exposure prophylaxis protocol.

Road safety

In September 2024, WHO supported the First National Scientific and Practical Conference on Road Safety topic, "Problems and prospects of ensuring road safety in the Kyrgyz Republic", which marked the 100th anniversary of the establishment of the Kyrgyz police. During the conference WHO shared insights from the *Global status report on road safety 2023*.⁴

With nearly 7000 traffic accidents, 780 deaths and over 11 000 injuries in 2023 alone, road safety is a growing concern for Kyrgyzstan.

The rapid increase in vehicles and the challenges posed by Kyrgyzstan's mountainous terrain make road safety a critical public health issue. Improving infrastructure and raising awareness are key to saving lives. Proven strategies like speed control and safer road design are essential to reducing fatalities.

⁴ Global status report on road safety 2023. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2023 (<https://iris.who.int/handle/10665/375016>). Licence: CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 IGO.



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Pillar 3. Promoting Kyrgyzstan beyond its borders to advance health and well-being

Health in the Mountains Agenda

As an initial step in advancing the Health in the Mountains Agenda, WHO and the Government of Kyrgyzstan convened a 2-day dialogue in June 2024. This event aimed to bolster government efforts to highlight the importance of health in mountainous areas by focusing on improving access to quality health services and addressing social and environmental determinants of health.



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The dialogue brought together over 90 participants from various sectors, including government leaders, sectoral ministries and agencies, regional authorities, health organizations, village health committees and development partners. Attendees shared insights, discussed challenges, and explored opportunities to strengthen health systems and address social determinants of health. Promising intersectoral initiatives emerged from the discussions, particularly at the local level, including efforts to promote healthy school meals, enhance water, sanitation and hygiene programmes, and construct midwife points [in Russian: Фельдшерско-акушерский пункт] to provide basic health care in rural areas.

The meeting explored key dimensions of health system strengthening in mountainous areas, building on ongoing government-led efforts. Persistent issues, such as uneven health workforce distribution and limited health facility density in rural mountain regions, were identified as significant barriers, with both metrics remaining below the national average. The dialogue emphasized the importance of strong subnational representation from regional and local governments, village health committees and development partners to close service coverage gaps. Among the recommendations was a comprehensive assessment of the demand for and access to health services in mountainous regions to generate evidence that would inform and support government reform actions.

In addition, WHO supports Kyrgyzstan's efforts to integrate health into the global climate change agenda. In 2024, WHO assisted the national health delegation in preparing to present at the COP29 in Baku, Azerbaijan. The health session at COP29 focused on: assessing climate risks and vulnerabilities in the health sector; developing a modern, effective health-care model for mountainous regions that ensures accessibility and quality in the face of climate change; and addressing nutrition and health challenges in mountainous areas within the context of climate change.

The Global Initiative for Childhood Cancer

In 2024, the WHO Country Office and the WHO Regional Office for Europe supported the Ministry of Health in organizing a national workshop for the Global Initiative for Childhood Cancer in May. The event, held under the patronage of the First Lady of Kyrgyzstan, Aigul Japarova, brought together key stakeholders, including the International Atomic Energy Agency, international professional societies such as the International Society of Paediatric Oncology and the Paediatric Radiation Oncology Society, and renowned centres from Armenia, France and Netherlands (Kingdom of the). National policy-makers, health-care professionals and patient organizations were also in attendance, marking a significant step forward in the country's efforts to address childhood cancer.

In collaboration with WHO, substantial progress was made in paediatric oncology during the workshop. Six clinical protocols were updated, and specialized training in infection control for childhood cancer was conducted, representing a critical advancement



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in improving paediatric cancer care in Kyrgyzstan. These developments highlight Kyrgyzstan's commitment to enhancing health-care services for children battling cancer.

In September, Kyrgyzstan marked its first-ever Childhood Cancer Awareness Month, a joint initiative organized by the Ministry of Health and the Republican Centre on Health Promotion. The awareness campaign included a knowledge assessment for regional doctors in Naryn and a specialized training on infection control in Osh in October. These efforts aimed to increase awareness and provide essential training for health-care professionals across the country.

A significant achievement was the establishment of a multidisciplinary meeting of health-care professionals to discuss and determine the best possible treatment plans for patients with cancer. This initiative is a vital part of oncology care, ensuring comprehensive decision-making that will facilitate improved treatment outcomes through multidisciplinary approaches. Additionally, two specialists received training in childhood oncology at the prestigious Princess Máxima Centre in Netherlands (Kingdom of the), further strengthening the national capacity for paediatric cancer care.

An ongoing early detection and treatment of cancer survey, aimed at improving paediatric cancer care, has already produced preliminary results that were presented at a conference in Moscow. A poster summarizing the findings won first place, showcasing Kyrgyzstan's innovative contributions to the field of paediatric oncology and highlighting the country's growing leadership in advancing childhood cancer care. Through these collective efforts, Kyrgyzstan is making significant strides in improving outcomes for children affected by cancer and positioning itself as a regional leader in paediatric oncology.

Subregional health diplomacy, including through the Roadmap for health and well-being in Central Asia, 2022–2025⁵

Health diplomacy through the Eurasian Economic Union

In 2024, WHO presented the findings of an assessment of the promotion of foods for children under 36 months in Kyrgyzstan conducted with support from the Behavioural and Cultural Insights team at the WHO Regional Office for Europe. The country imports all complementary feeding products for this age group, primarily from Eurasian Economic Union countries. The labelling and composition of 260 commercially available prepared foods (excluding breast milk substitutes) were evaluated for compliance with the WHO Regional Office for Europe's 2022 Nutrient and Promotion Profile Model and national nutritional guidelines.



The assessment revealed that the same range of products is available both in-store and online, with a significant proportion marketed for children under 6 months, contrary to WHO guidelines, which negatively impacts breastfeeding and optimal infant feeding practices. Many food labels lacked essential nutritional information, and several products contained high levels of sugar and salt or included sweeteners. Since excessive sugar and salt intake at an early age increases the risk of NCDs later in life, Kyrgyzstan has taken steps to develop a regulatory framework for food marketing to improve the nutrition and health of this vulnerable population.

⁵ Roadmap for health and well-being in Central Asia (2022–2025). Copenhagen: WHO Regional Office for Europe; 2022 (<https://iris.who.int/handle/10665/364330>). Licence: CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 IGO.

As Kyrgyzstan relies on imported baby food products, there is an urgent need for advocacy to improve the labelling and composition of these products across the Eurasian Economic Union and the broader WHO European Region.

Central Asian International Health Investment Forum

On 26–27 June 2024, Kyrgyzstan hosted the first-ever Central Asia International Health Investment Forum in Bishkek, under the patronage of the President of the Kyrgyz Republic and co-organized by WHO Regional Office for Europe and the Ministry of Health of Kyrgyzstan. Held under the motto “Health is the best investment”, the Forum convened high-level representatives from the five Central Asian countries—Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan—alongside international donors, development partners, and policy-makers.



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The Forum served as a landmark platform to highlight the transformative role of health investments in accelerating sustainable development in the region. Over two days, participants shared innovative approaches and successful models, such as digital health solutions and public–private partnerships, to improve health system efficiency and outcomes. Discussions addressed key priorities, including strengthening PHC, tackling communicable diseases such as tuberculosis and HIV, reducing the burden of NCDs, enhancing emergency preparedness, and responding to the health impacts of climate change.



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The Forum culminated in a strong regional commitment to scale up health investment, underpinned by the endorsement of the Central Asia Health Investment Plan. This plan outlines 11 priority areas for targeted investment and will be guided by a newly established Central Asia Health Investment Group, comprising country leaders and development partners who will meet regularly to monitor progress on the Roadmap for Health and Well-being in Central Asia (2022–2025).

Speaking on behalf of His Excellency Mr Sadyr Japarov, President of the Kyrgyz Republic, Deputy Prime Minister Mr Edil Baisalov emphasized the vision of “shared prosperity”—where peace, security, and mutual economic growth in the region are anchored in strong, resilient health systems.

The Forum marked a pivotal step towards positioning health as a cornerstone of regional development and cooperation in Central Asia.



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Strategic communication

Throughout 2024, strategic communication remained a central focus, aiming to enhance efforts to engage a broader audience and raise awareness of key health issues. The development of a comprehensive communication strategy for 2025–2030, alongside an actionable communication and social media plan, provide a clear roadmap for the WHO Country Office’s outreach and advocacy efforts over the next 7 years. The strategy emphasizes expanding the reach of health messages through digital platforms, enhancing collaboration with key stakeholders and increasing the impact of WHO’s work in Kyrgyzstan.



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A cornerstone of the communication strategy was the use of social media channels, which enabled the WHO Country Office to engage a wider audience and promote public health initiatives. The launch of official social media accounts on Facebook, X, Instagram and LinkedIn in early 2023 allowed for the continuous dissemination of health messages, advocacy materials and updates on ongoing projects. This social media presence has become a key tool for raising awareness on critical health issues and keeping the public informed. Throughout 2024, the WHO Country Office organically reached, on average, over 12 000 people per month through social media channels and received more than 1500 reactions to social media posts. In total, the number of followers on all four channels increased by 170% in a year, to reach 4068

To ensure consistent communication with partners and donors, the WHO Country Office launched a monthly e-newsletter. This newsletter has played a vital role in keeping stakeholders up to date with the latest developments, programme activities and upcoming initiatives.

Throughout 2024, the WHO Country Office actively organized a series of awareness-raising campaigns around various flagship health days and weeks. These included global observances such as World Health Day, World Blood Donor Day, International Lead Poisoning Prevention Week and United Nations Day, among others. Each campaign focused on key health issues relevant to the Kyrgyz context, helping to raise public awareness and encourage positive behaviour change. The WHO Country Office’s strategic communications efforts continue to play a critical role in supporting public health goals and enhancing the visibility of WHO’s work in Kyrgyzstan.

Looking ahead

In 2025 and beyond, the WHO Country Office in Kyrgyzstan will focus on the strategic priorities of its Country Cooperation Strategy by utilizing support from all three levels of WHO. Major initiatives and activities planned for 2024 are listed below.

- High-level national policy dialogue to present HLMA findings.
- High-level national policy dialogue to present the results of the investment cases on mental health and NCDs.
- Conduct research on investment case for digital health in Kyrgyzstan.
- Complete the AMR prevalence study and share results widely.
- Support the country implementation of the National Adaptation Plan on climate change for the health sector 2025–2029.
- Organize a regional training on how to conduct simulation exercises on emergency preparedness and response for Central Asian countries.
- Draw a sustainability roadmap for telemedicine to enhance accessibility to telemedicine services and integrate it into national health-care systems.
- Comprehensive cybersecurity assessment of the health information system to identify vulnerabilities and deliver actionable recommendations for enhancing system resilience.
- Conduct WHO assessment of barriers to effective coverage of health services in support of equity-oriented reforms towards UHC to generate evidence and identify supply-and-demand-side barriers to health services in remote mountainous areas vulnerable to the impact of climate change.
- Support development of a model regulation of rural outpatient clinics with the definition of a standard service package, appropriate infrastructure and equipment, and human and financial resources.

The WHO Regional Office for Europe

The World Health Organization (WHO) is a specialized agency of the United Nations created in 1948 with the primary responsibility for international health matters and public health. The WHO Regional Office for Europe is one of six regional offices throughout the world, each with its own programme geared to the particular health conditions of the countries it serves.

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