



USING SURVEYS TO HEAR COMMUNITY VIEWS IN THE COVID-19 RESPONSE

Experience from Kazakhstan,
South Caucasus and Turkey



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**RED CRESCENT
OF KAZAKHSTAN**

TURKISHREDCRESCENT



TÜRK KIZILAYI

1868





Turkey, 2021 Husband and wife, Ahmet and Naime, fled Syria in 2014 after a bomb hit near their home in Aleppo. Now, they live in Gaziantep, Turkey with their four children. © Corrie Butler / IFRC

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INTRODUCTION

Recognising the importance of people's knowledge, perceptions, and attitudes has been critical throughout the humanitarian response to the global COVID-19 pandemic.

From supporting people's understanding of the virus, to sharing information on preventing its spread, or tackling rumours and misinformation about vaccination, understanding people's knowledge and needs is a necessity.

The inter-connected nature of the global pandemic has highlighted the need for efforts to understand community perceptions to be systematic, coherent, and consistent, enabling people's views to inform decision-making not just at the local level, but at national and international levels too.

In response to this increasingly recognised necessity to listen more closely to communities, Red Cross and Red Crescent National Societies have deployed surveys and questionnaires on an unprecedented scale, sharing their findings internally and with partners to more effectively shape the response.

This case study seeks to illustrate some of the approaches National Societies have adopted to implementing surveys in their various contexts, the benefits and limitations they have experienced, and the best practices they have identified.



KAZAKHSTAN TELEPHONE SURVEYS

Gathering insights over the phone

In late 2020, and with vaccines still in development, the Red Crescent of Kazakhstan (RCS RK) took steps to better understand public knowledge and perceptions of COVID-19.

As well as people's existing knowledge of the virus, RCS RK also wanted to know what the most popular – and trusted – sources of information were.

A national telephone survey of 1,000 people randomly selected from across the country was identified as the best approach, able to give a statistically meaningful overview.

With limited internal capacity, RCS RK turned to an experienced external polling company as an affordable alternative to in-house implementation.

Outsourcing the survey not only made financial sense, but also avoided overloading the National Society with intensive data collection and management responsibilities at a time when resources were already stretched.

The survey was limited to 22 questions to ensure insights were focussed, manageable and actionable.

Results showed wide awareness of COVID-19 as a virus people needed to protect themselves against, but there were gaps in understanding about how the virus spread and which safety measures were effective.

The survey also highlighted the importance of social media as an information source for people in Kazakhstan.

By identifying the information gaps and the best channels to address those, the findings fed into an overall strategy, as well as informing construction of the RCS RK COVID-19 chatbot which automatically responds to questions about the virus submitted on social media.



Alisher Assylbekov

Public Relations Specialist with the RCS RK and part of the team that commissioned the survey

We recognised that we needed a better grasp of people's understanding and knowledge around COVID-19.

Working with the external company was really useful, as well as carrying out the survey they also helped us develop and simplify the questions which was really valuable – they advised us on making the questions easier to understand.

We understood what we were asking, but people outside the Red Crescent might not, so it was really helpful to get external input.

Finding the right provider was really important, we did a lot of research to find a company that was a good fit, was good to work with, and who brought their own expertise to the project.

Previously I carried out online surveys, but I was pleased with the telephone methodology which allows for more human interaction, explanation, and discussion which you don't have in automated online forms.



Marat Meldekhanov

*Head of Health
Red Crescent of Kazakhstan*

Conducting a survey to understand people's perceptions of COVID-19 and see where we could strengthen our work to best effect was always a good idea.

The telephone surveys provided a really good foundation from which we could build.

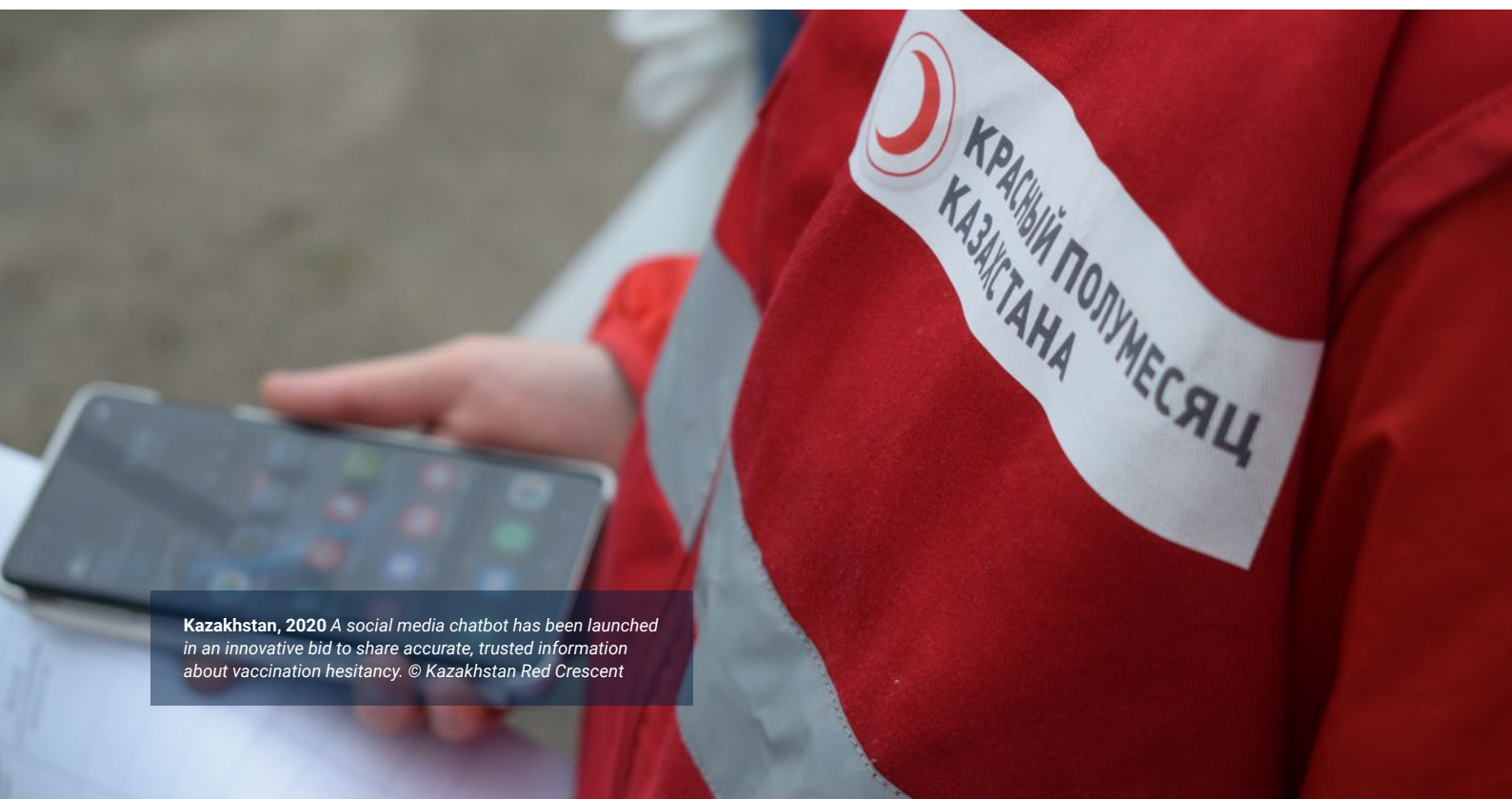
We learned, for example, that although almost everyone was aware of COVID-19 as a new disease, knowledge around effective prevention and what to do if a person had symptoms was much, much lower.

We also learned about the most popular channels for people to access information about COVID-19.

Combining this together we were able to identify next steps to fill information gaps and help combat the virus.

The telephone survey was one of the most effective approaches we could have used, it gave us the information we needed.

It allowed us to evaluate the effectiveness of our work, find out what we needed to strengthen, and set a path for the work ahead.



Kazakhstan, 2020 A social media chatbot has been launched in an innovative bid to share accurate, trusted information about vaccination hesitancy. © Kazakhstan Red Crescent

Key Lessons

● External providers can be the best option

In-house implementation of surveys may be the preferred option, but costs, capacity, and additional workloads can make trusted external providers the most appropriate option, bringing fresh expertise and reducing demands on staff and volunteers. Working with external providers should still be an opportunity to build internal capacity, learn new skills, and expand networks with new partners.

● Choose the best survey for your context

The choice to carry out a nationally representative random survey gave a good overview of knowledge and attitudes in the country as a whole, laying the foundation for initial decision making, further work, and drawing attention to issues that could be investigated further.

● Reach out for support, and stay focussed

Working together with colleagues in the health department, and having a clear idea of how the data being collected would be used, kept the survey focussed and ensured findings could be practically applied. Limiting the survey to a small number of focussed questions made it more likely the results would generate manageable, actionable data.

Links

<https://communityengagementhub.org/resource/chatbots-a-conversation-with-the-community-a-kazakhstan-case-study/>

Examples of National Society surveys can be found at <https://communityengagementhub.org/>

Contacts

Marat Meldekhanov Head of Health – m.meldekhanov@redcross.kz

Alisher Assylbekov Public Relations Specialist with the RCS RK – alisher.assylbekov@redcross.kz



SOUTH CAUCASUS MULTI-COUNTRY SURVEY

Understanding the needs of older people

Across the globe, older people have borne the brunt of the pandemic.

As elsewhere, in the South Caucasus – Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia – older people have been heavily impacted by both the virus itself and measures adopted to tackle it.

Already deeply involved in services for older people, as the extent of the pandemic became clear National Societies and Movement partners across Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia, moved quickly to better understand the impact of COVID-19 on older people and their caregivers.

A study across the three countries, based on surveys and interviews with this key demographic, was developed to ensure their voices informed response plans.

Almost 2,200 older people and more than 150 caregivers across the three countries shared their experiences, giving an unprecedented overview of the situation across the region.

As well as informing the COVID-19 response – for example emphasising the need for increased prioritisation of mental health and psycho-social support to older people and their caregivers – there have been other knock-on effects too, including improved wellbeing among the participants themselves.



Keti Mindeli

*Head of Health
Georgia Red Cross*

We really see the survey as one of our key achievements during COVID-19.

It demonstrated not only the impact of COVID-19 but also much more about people's situations, giving a real insight into the lives of the people we work with.

A study like this gives us the ability to use our resources more rationally and more efficiently, and ultimately to better support the people we are seeking to assist.

People appreciated simply being involved in the survey and being asked their opinions, this in itself supported feelings of self-confidence and reduced their sense of helplessness

The survey and report also really refreshed recognition of the work of the Red Cross amongst key stakeholders, particularly in the government sector.

When we are able to present a national survey like this it really shows our reach, the scope of what we can do, and underlines our position as a key actor.



Sabina Mahbubi-Iran

*Deputy Secretary General
Azerbaijan Red Crescent*

The information was really useful, it helped us understand the relevance of our work and what we need to change.

We've been able to use it across other projects as well, so it has really helped.

We were able to adapt questions, and through training and practical experience it was great for the volunteers to learn how to do the surveys better.

We regularly do surveys, and this definitely helped us improve.



Azerbaijan, 2020 With the support of the IFRC, volunteers and staff of Azerbaijan Red Crescent distribute food packages and hygiene kits to lonely older people across the country. © Azerbaijan Red Crescent Society



Kristina Ispiryan

*Head of Healthcare and Social Dept.
Armenian Red Cross Society*

In Armenia, the survey provided information that could be concretely responded to.

It enabled us to evaluate the situation for older people, understand the issues they face, and offer recommendations for improvement.

Like developing a clear strategy to support home care services, enhancing our coordination with other stakeholders working with older people, and continuing to raise awareness of the support older people have a right to receive and are entitled to.

The need for home care services is much higher than can be covered, and the survey helped us understand where the priority challenges are and how we can most effectively respond in both the short and long term.



Gerlinde Astleithner

*Programme Coordinator
Austrian Red Cross work in South Caucasus*

One country could not represent the situation in all three – in each country the situation was different: different living conditions, different government actions and support, and it was important to see this.

The heads of health from the National Societies were deeply engaged – their involvement was crucial.

The findings are very authentic; these are the experiences of real people on the ground – if I wrote something just from my desk in Vienna it would have been very different.

We knew things were difficult for older people, but the care workers themselves were also facing so many challenges and were really traumatised.

It sounds obvious, but often it is only when we start asking people that they start telling us, and without doing that we cannot know.



Armenia, 2020 Armenian Red Cross volunteers deliver humanitarian parcels in Gyumri, Shirak Region. Each package includes food and hygiene products. © Armenian Red Cross

Key Lessons

● Coordinate regionally with National Societies in the driving seat

The co-ordinated, multi-country approach ensured surveys were consistent across the three countries, providing comparable data while also delivering efficiencies. It was critical that National Societies were involved at every step and led the process in their respective countries.

● Recognise and capitalise on unique strengths

National Societies' unique relationships with older people and their caregivers enabled hard to reach people, who other sampling approaches could have missed, to share their experiences, informing the development of activities in response. Being included in the survey and asked their views reportedly helped participants feel more valued and self-sufficient.

● Build capacity and partnerships

Delivering the surveys not only built the skills of staff and volunteers, but by working with partners – including government and UN agency counterparts – also boosted the National Societies' profile and standing. Findings from the surveys have also informed planning in multiple subsequent programmes.

Links

Full Report – <https://communityengagementhub.org/resource/impact-study-of-covid-19-on-older-people-and-caregivers-in-the-south-caucasus/>

<https://communityengagementhub.org/resource/public-attitudes-and-perceptions-towards-covid-19-vaccines-in-georgia/>

Contacts

Kristina Ispiryan Armenia Red Cross Head of Health – arcs-health@redcross.am

Sabina Mahbubi-Iran Azerbaijan Red Crescent Deputy Secretary General – sabina.mahbubiiran@redcrescent.az

Keti Mindeli Head of Health with Georgia Red Cross – kmindeli@redcross.ge

Gerlinde Astleithner Programme Coordinator for Austrian Red Cross work in South Caucasus – gerlinde.astleithner@roteskreuz.at



TURKEY KAP SURVEYS

Reaching out remotely for surveys and discussion

As COVID-19 spread, the Turkish Red Crescent Society recognised that understanding of the virus was evolving rapidly, with information gaps feeding misperceptions, rumours, and panic.

People in refugee communities were felt to be at particular risk of lacking reliable, consistent and trusted information about the virus.

To help understand people's Knowledge, Attitudes, and Practices (KAP), as well as their information needs, around COVID-19, a KAP survey of more than 3,000 people was conducted during July and August 2020, with follow-up rounds in November 2020, and March and April 2021.

The surveys focused on refugee and host communities around the 18 Community Centres TRCS operates across the country which offer vocational and language training, health and psychosocial support, and other services, to new arrivals and long-term local residents alike.

To avoid spreading the virus further, interviews were carried out over the phone and accompanying focus group discussions hosted online.

Existing capacity and skills – from volunteers trained and experienced in carrying out surveys and focus groups, to expert information management specialists – meant that TRCS, working together with the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) were able to deliver the surveys in-house.

As well as guiding the development of information materials and providing insight into people's understanding of the virus, carrying out the research also helped build trust.

In total, more than 10,000 interviews were carried out, and almost 1,000 people engaged in focus groups.



Fatma Nur Bakkalbaşı

IFRC Community Engagement and Accountability Officer in Turkey

TRCS have an excellent relationship with the communities where they work, so that was a huge advantage – together we have unique capacity and access to do these kinds of surveys.

The data quality was really good, and it gave us insight into people's perceptions of the virus, and particularly what their information needs were.

We visibly reached out to people and gave them room to share questions and concerns.

People said they felt listened to because someone had asked what they knew and what they wanted to know.

Although the focus groups were online with everyone calling in, it was one of the first times during the pandemic that people had seen each other and been able to interact in a group together like that, sharing things they had heard and discussing the situation.

It created a real sense of community and solidarity.

The use of KoBo Toolbox, a free-to-use electronic system utilising mobile devices for data collection, removed the need for time-consuming data entry from paper forms, speeding up the entire process and eliminating opportunities for human error.

Information management specialists then analysed and visualised the data, creating a stand-alone website where results and findings could be easily viewed and shared.

The team were also able to triangulate results against information collected through feedback mechanisms in the Community Centres, adding an additional layer of assurance.

Questions and rumours were followed up for verification, with information in response shared back to communities through videos, social media posts, WhatsApp groups, advisory committees at each of the community centres, and, where appropriate, face-to-face meetings.

One key benefit internally has been the closer working of the Community Engagement, Communications, and Health teams who collaborated increasingly closely to receive, analyse, and effectively and accurately respond to the information collected.

Carrying out surveys over the course of several months, also enabled the tracking of changes over time, something that was particularly highlighted when vaccines became available.



Tenadi Gölemerz

***Monitoring and Evaluation Officer
Turkish Red Crescent Society***

In the third KAP survey there were a lot of rumours about vaccination, and we were able to respond to these working with the Health and Communications departments.

A lot of people weren't sure if refugees could access vaccinations through the standard system, for example.

We checked and confirmed that people who have residency in Turkey can get vaccinated the same as any Turkish citizen, so we were then able to share this with communities, which was really important for them to know.

We are now planning some smaller research looking at specific issues picked up by the KAP surveys and feedback mechanisms – vaccination and satisfaction surveys for example.

Now we know how these surveys and feedback mechanisms work and how useful they can be I'm sure we'll see this approach more and more, because we've really seen the benefit.

Key Lessons

● Collect relevant data to inform decision making

Comprehensive KAP surveys focussed on identifying differences between how people who are refugees and those from host communities perceived COVID-19 and related issues, provided a strong evidence base for decision making.

● Collaboration builds relationships, capacity, and trust

Delivered in-house, drawing on existing capacities, and working with partners across multiple departments, developing the surveys increased internal collaboration, while at the same time building trust with communities where the surveys were conducted.

● Target qualitative research to deepen understanding

Remote focus group interviews conducted over zoom provided further qualitative input and explanation to contextualise raw survey data. Repeating the surveys and focus groups over time helped identify trends, while results were also triangulated with information provided through the National Society's feedback mechanism. Being able to regularly repeat surveys was a real strength, allowing the tracking of trends and to see how perceptions changed over time.

Links

Information on KoBo Toolbox – <https://www.ifrc.org/ifrc-kobo>

Rumour Tracking Report available on the community engagement hub – <https://communityengagementhub.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2021/10/Rumour-tracking-report-2021.pdf>

Community Feedback Reports on Community Engagement Hub – <https://communityengagementhub.org/resource/community-feedback-report-turkey/>

KAP Survey Results on Community Engagement Hub – <https://communityengagementhub.org/resource/knowledge-attitudes-and-practices-kap-assessment-on-covid-19-round-3/>

Lessons Learned Report on Community Engagement Hub – <https://communityengagementhub.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2021/09/COVID-19-LESSONS-LEARNED-WORKSHOP-REPORT.pdf>

Contacts

Tenadi Gölemerz Monitoring and Evaluation Officer, Turkish Red Crescent Society – tenadi.golemerz@kizilay.org.tr

Fatma Nur Bakkalbaşı IFRC Community Engagement and Accountability Officer in Turkey – fatmanur.bakkalbasi@ifrc.org

CONCLUSION

One of the most direct ways of better understanding communities, surveys can help organisations listen to, engage, and better understand the views of people across communities where they work.

Helping better meet people's needs, successful surveys are achievable across a wide range of contexts, and do not have to be resource or labour intensive.

1

Context specific – As highlighted by the examples here, it is important for National Societies to select and adapt the approaches which best fit their context and needs.

National Societies may be well placed to conduct surveys themselves, but limitations can mean that working with an external provider is a more efficient, effective, and sensible solution.

Even with an external partner, internal capacity-building can still be gained, for example through increasing the National Society's network, and learning from the expertise external partners can bring.

2

Deciding who to engage and listen to is absolutely key – National surveys using random sampling can give a useful overview of general attitudes and inform broad mass campaigns. National Societies' relationships with people they already work with can enable unique access to help raise the voices and concerns of marginalised and vulnerable people.

3

Surveys should never stand alone – data collection efforts must always be integrated alongside and within other activities, ensuring the information collected is practically useful and relevant, and avoiding duplication or wasted effort.

4

Coordination is critical – internally, work across sectors and departments to ensure surveys combine with other organisational feedback activities and monitoring such as focus groups, community feedback mechanisms, social media listening or post distribution monitoring etc – to create a cohesive whole. Externally, coordinate closely with government authorities and other counterparts, such as UN agencies, to support the consistency and standardisation of data collection, share findings, and avoid overlapping with or repeating the work of others.

THE FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES OF THE INTERNATIONAL RED CROSS AND RED CRESCENT MOVEMENT

Humanity

The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, born of a desire to bring assistance without discrimination to the wounded on the battlefield, endeavours, in its international and national capacity, to prevent and alleviate human suffering wherever it may be found. Its purpose is to protect life and health and to ensure respect for the human being. It promotes mutual understanding, friendship, cooperation and lasting peace amongst all peoples.

Impartiality

It makes no discrimination as to nationality, race, religious beliefs, class or political opinions. It endeavours to relieve the suffering of individuals, being guided solely by their needs, and to give priority to the most urgent cases of distress.

Neutrality

In order to enjoy the confidence of all, the Movement may not take sides in hostilities or engage at any time in controversies of a political, racial, religious or ideological nature.

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The Movement is independent. The National Societies, while auxiliaries in the humanitarian services of their governments and subject to the laws of their respective countries, must always maintain their autonomy so that they may be able at all times to act in accordance with the principles of the Movement.

Voluntary service

It is a voluntary relief movement not prompted in any manner by desire for gain.

Unity

There can be only one Red Cross or Red Crescent Society in any one country. It must be open to all. It must carry on its humanitarian work throughout its territory.

Universality

The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, in which all societies have equal status and share equal responsibilities and duties in helping each other, is worldwide.



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

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Address: Chemin des Crêts 17, Petit-Saconnex, 1209 Geneva, Switzerland

Postal address: P.O. Box 303, 1211 Geneva 19, Switzerland

T +41 (0)22 730 42 22 | **F** +41 (0)22 730 42 00 | **E** secretariat@ifrc.org | **W** ifrc.org

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