



USAID Safe Migration in Central Asia (SMICA) Activity Annual Highlights

Period Covered: October 1, 2020 – September 30, 2021

Overview











The global COVID-19 pandemic put millions of migrants from Central Asia in precarious situations, both in terms of health and safety, as well as income. Recognizing this, the SMICA activity allocated funds for a COVID-19 response including emergency assistance, skills training, and information campaigns.

SMICA leveraged new and existing tools to raise awareness about trafficking in persons (TIP), collect data, and better coordinate CSO efforts to support survivors of trafficking and people vulnerable to TIP in Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyz Republic, and Turkmenistan. SMICA also successfully engaged governments to enhance or create policies about forced labor and assist victims of trafficking (VoTs).

INTERMEDIATE RESULT 1 (REGIONAL): STRENGTHENED BILATERAL AND MULTI-COUNTRY STRATEGIES AND ACTIONS TO PROMOTE RIGHTS-BASED MIGRATION AND COUNTER TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS (CTIP)

This year SMICA engaged with NGO and government partners on policy development. In the Kyrgyz Republic this engagement included developing standard operating procedures (SOPs) for ministries, the Ombudsman, and NGOs for the operationalization of the National Referral Mechanism. Several ministries have already adopted the drafted SOPs. In Turkmenistan, SMICA provided technical assistance in the development of the National Action Plan (NAP) for Human Rights for 2021-2025, incorporating fair labor concepts for the state and private sectors. The President of Turkmenistan adopted the NAP on April 16, including a section focusing on the government tasks to prevent forced labor. In Uzbekistan, a series of working meetings with regional CTIP Commissions resulted in a discussion of findings and recommendations focused on all aspects of TIP prevention, prosecution, and assistance to victims. The recommendations were shared with the National Rapporteur on CTIP and will strengthen the government's ability to address the existing challenges in combatting human trafficking, improve policy, and allocate necessary resources for CTIP. NGO partners in Kazakhstan are engaged in providing input to the draft Law "On Combating Trafficking in Persons in the Republic of Kazakhstan." This engagement also includes recommendations for strengthening the SOPs for government assistance to VoTs, including foreign VoTs.

Country	Number of anti-TIP policies, laws, or international agreements developed or strengthened in 2021 with SMICA support	U.S. Department of State Tier Ranking	
		2020	2021
Kazakhstan 	1	Tier 2 Watch List	 Tier 2
Kyrgyz Republic 	3	Tier 2 Watch List	 Tier 2
Uzbekistan 	1	Tier 2 Watch List	 Tier 2
Turkmenistan 	1	Tier 3	 Tier 3

Regionally, SMICA worked with state organizations to discuss monitoring and regulation of Private Employment Agencies (PEAs). Representatives of state authorities of Central Asian countries, a representative of the Moldovan Agency for Employment, and an ILO consultant shared their experience. SMICA also organized and facilitated a

session with Central Asian CSOs to discuss barriers to evidence uptake by CSOs and developed a concrete list of ways forward. In collaboration with UNODC and the Government of Turkey, SMICA initiated a coordination meeting between TIP authorities of Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Turkey, a key destination country. The meeting helped establish a dialogue between the TIP authorities and offered a platform to discuss priority issues related to migrants' rights and their protection in Turkey.

SMICA launched a WhatsApp chat group for CTIP NGOs across Central Asia, which serves as a regional CSO Platform for knowledge exchange and referrals of TIP victims. Thirty-three NGO representatives participate in the chat. Thanks to the platform, NGOs have quickly coordinated repatriation of migrants between different countries. The platform is also used to coordinate information campaigns and announce training or funding opportunities, as well as to share the experience of CSOs on CTIP issues.

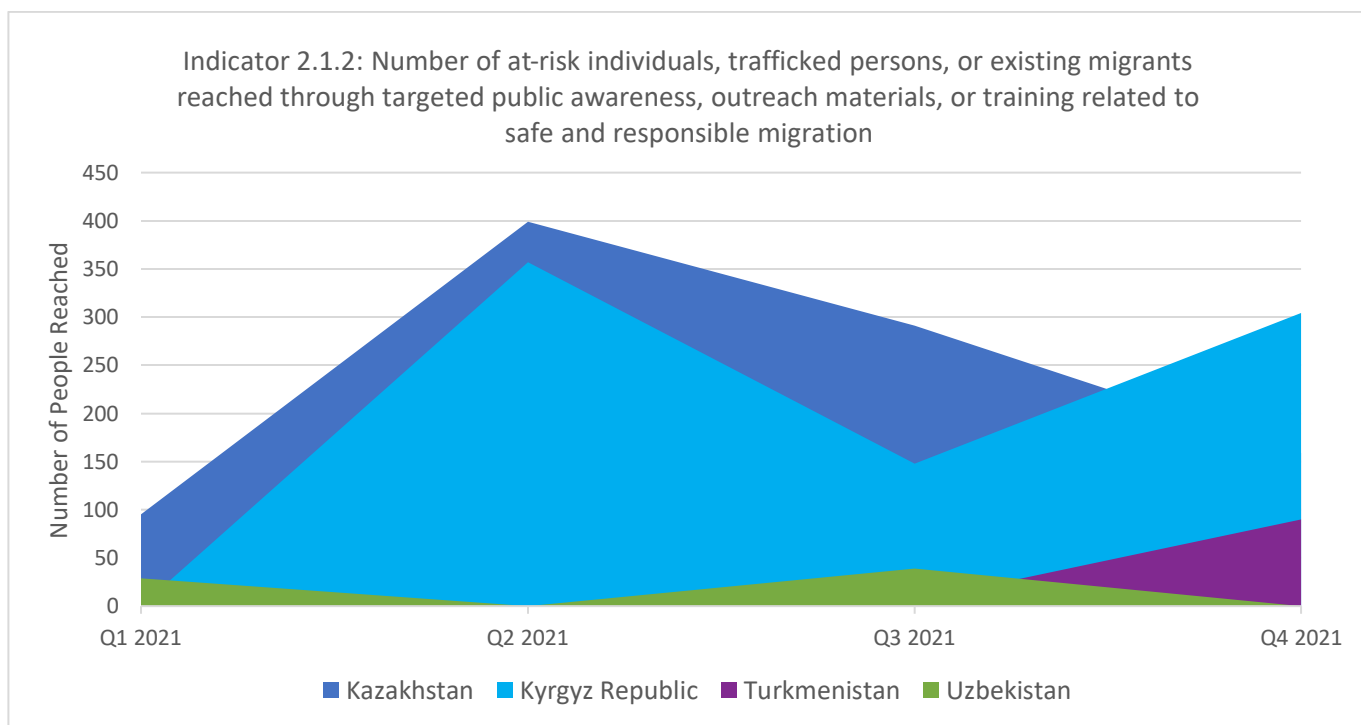


INTERMEDIATE RESULT 2 (PREVENTION): VULNERABILITY OF AT-RISK POPULATIONS TO ALL FORMS OF TIP REDUCED

SMICA partnered with 17 CSOs in Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Kyrgyzstan to provide information about migrants' rights through awareness-raising campaigns, hotlines, and social media. SMICA used the attention of International Migrant's Day and World Day Against Trafficking in Persons to raise public awareness. On both occasions, SMICA developed and disseminated informational booklets, infographics, and videos with unified messaging from NGO and government partners through traditional outlets, social media, and in-person events.

During the year SMICA produced and adapted video materials for campaigns and training, such as a short feature film on risks of TIP for the hearing impaired in the Kyrgyz Republic and an award-winning public service announcement on TIP in Uzbekistan featuring influential bloggers. These information campaigns reached millions of people within SMICA countries and their impact was noted for increased calls to the hotlines featured in the materials. SMICA also engaged with the private sector, collaborating with transportation companies and the hospitality industry in Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan, and construction firms, farmers, and food processors and distributors in Kazakhstan to raise their awareness about TIP and the need to engage in fair labor practices.

SMICA also supported the development of new tools to assist migrant communities and government agencies responsible for migration and protection. In the Kyrgyz Republic, SMICA worked with the Information-Consultation Center of the Department of External Migration (ICC-DEM) on a new user-friendly online portal <https://www.migrant.kg/ru/>. The site now provides up-to-date migration information for Kyrgyz migrants abroad as well as aspiring migrants. The portal also links to the ICC DEM hotline for free consultations. During the first five months of its operation, 4,712 people contacted the hotline by phone, WhatsApp, and in-person.



In cooperation with the Uzbekistan Sub-Commission on Countering Trafficking in Persons, SMICA developed and launched a Telegram bot @salom_migrant_bot, a virtual consultant on migration and human trafficking, which reached more than 300,000 views in its first month online. Through the chatbot, labor migrants can learn about the rules for work and residence abroad and the rights and obligations of labor migrants, as well as the types of support available to migrants, including useful tips related to COVID-19. Within several days of the launch, the government noted that the chatbot helped to identify several cases of TIP.

In Kazakhstan, the SMICA team worked with NGO partners to pilot a youth TIP awareness training called “Smart Navigator” which was adapted from World Vision. The training program uses innovative approaches for engaging vulnerable and at-risk youth in discussions about modern slavery but also provides soft skills training to build confidence and develop critical thinking. SMICA partner NGOs piloted the program in six regions of Kazakhstan. As a result, 91.9% (159/173) of at-risk youth increased their knowledge and skills in safe migration that they can now share with their peers.



INTERMEDIATE RESULT 3 (PROTECTION): IDENTIFICATION AND ASSISTANCE TO TRAFFICKED PERSONS EXPANDED AND IMPROVED

SMICA conducted training in different modalities throughout the year: in-person, online, and in hybrid formats. NGO partners trained government officers on the nature of TIP and the interventions needed from frontline officers (health, education, social services, labor inspectors) in seven regions of Kazakhstan. In Uzbekistan SMICA trained hotel personnel on recognizing the signs of trafficking and how to take action. In the Kyrgyz Republic SMICA is cooperating with the Advocates Training Center and their established network of lawyers to train their network of advocates on a victim-centered approach as they provide pro bono assistance to victims of trafficking.

As a result of the COVID pandemic, by the end of 2020, many migrants were stranded within Kazakhstan without jobs and unable to return home because of travel limitations and border closures. SMICA partners delivered food and hygiene supplies to 1,020 Uzbek and Tajik migrants trapped at the Kazakhstan–Uzbekistan border by the end of 2020 and to another 948 migrants in vulnerable situations. Many of them also received legal consultations on employment opportunities and new migration rules in Kazakhstan, as well as on COVID-19 precautionary measures. NGOs provided legal services to retrieve or process missing documents or wages that had been held back by employers or contractors.

SMICA provided support to NGOs to continue running hotlines during the year in Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic, and Turkmenistan, as well as providing support for maintaining a shelter in Turkmenistan where eight victims of trafficking were accommodated. In the Kyrgyz Republic in addition to the hotlines, SMICA provided support to a network of lawyers trained in the victim-centered-approach who provide pro bono legal services to victims of trafficking identified by NGOs and crisis centers.

To improve data collection and standardization, SMICA successfully introduced the Victim Case Management System (VCMS), a tool facilitating record-keeping for frontline organizations assisting trafficking victims, through a pilot with a local partner NGO in Kazakhstan. The use of a shared VCMS platform by CSOs will contribute to more effective protection of victims.

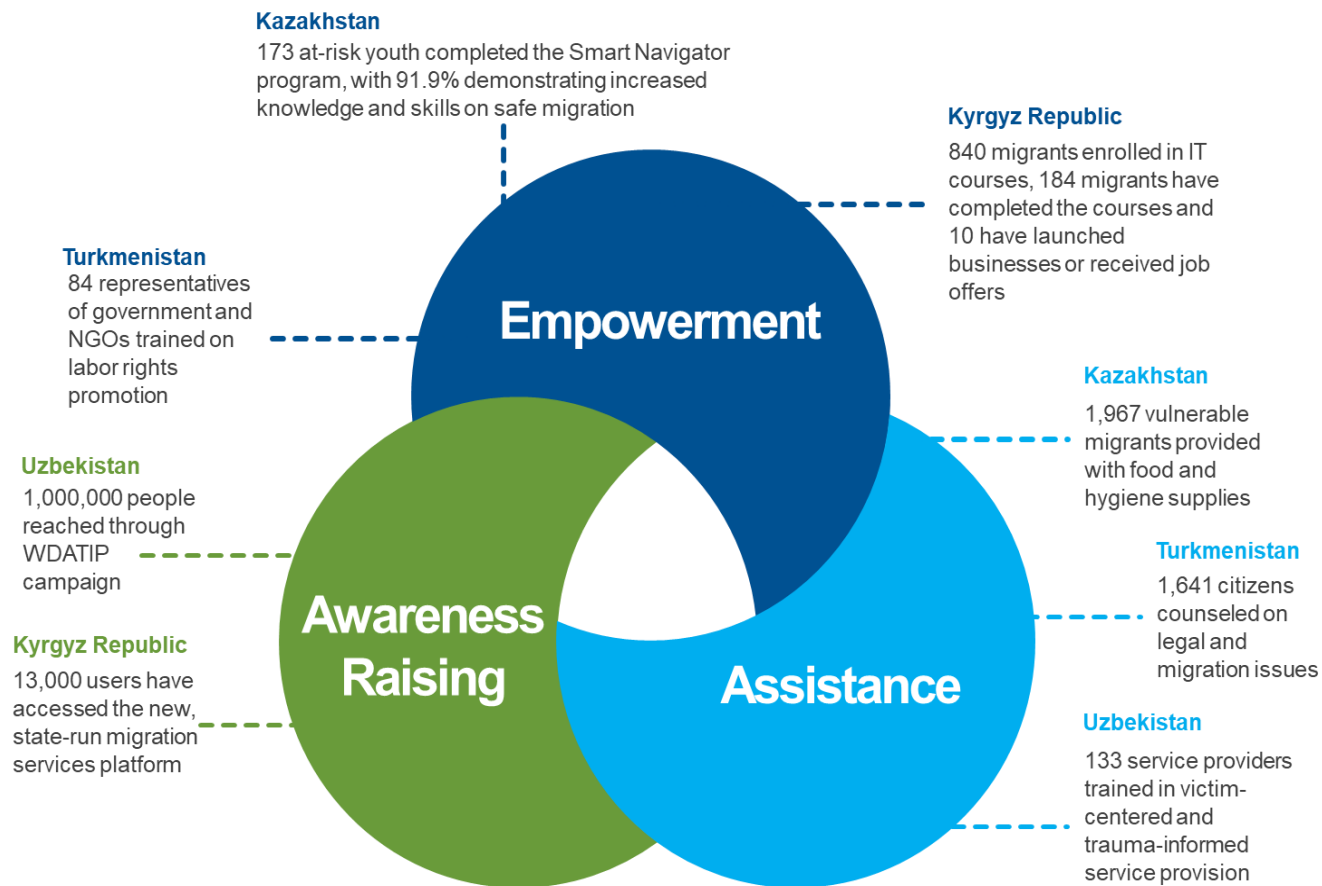


Intermediate Result 4 (Prosecution): Increased Prosecution of TIP (the Kyrgyz Republic)

In the Kyrgyz Republic, SMICA conducted research to guide both activities and improvements in prosecution practices in the country. SMICA finalized the gap assessment in the reporting of TIP cases by NGOs and those officially registered with law enforcement. The evidence and findings gathered through this research can be used to advocate for specific changes in law and enforcement practices, leading to improved identification of victims, increased case filing, and more effective investigation of TIP crimes. Collaborative efforts of government agencies and CSOs to address the identified gaps and bottlenecks are expected to lead to greater numbers of registered TIP cases and an increase in their prosecution rates.

SMICA signed the Memorandum of Partnership and Cooperation with 12 organizations actively involved in expanding the capacity of criminal justice practitioners and facilitated a meeting of the parliamentary working group on amendments to the Law “On the State-guaranteed Legal Aid,” resulting in the initiative’s working group members support for an amendment to include VoTs into the named category without requiring proof of their financial standing. The working group will work with members of parliament to effectuate the amendments in the *Jogorku Kenesh* (the Parliament). In addition, SMICA worked together with government and NGO partners to develop a victim-centered approach training curriculum for criminal justice actors in the Kyrgyz Republic.

FY2021 Numbers – At a Glance



Adaptive Management and Learning

SMICA developed the SMICA Collaborating, Learning, and Adapting (CLA) strategy. This strategy describes the SMICA approach to CLA, a set of processes and activities that help ensure project activities are coordinated, grounded in evidence, and adjusted as necessary to remain effective throughout the SMICA implementation. It helps ensure that learning is an integral part of the ongoing project activities. This strategy calls for participation from both technical and operational staff and will be fully integrated into day-to-day activities. It guides staff in their reflection on project activities and adaptation. Some of the outputs of the CLA strategy will be documenting project learnings. SMICA will share this knowledge with others for decision-making purposes. By having this CLA strategy, SMICA creates an environment that encourages openness to new opportunities.

In June 2021, SMICA held its first CLA Pause and Reflect Workshop, engaging NGO partners as well as USAID colleagues. During the four-day session, one half day was devoted to meeting with USAID colleagues and one-half day was devoted to meeting with NGO partners from three countries. The workshop also included a half-day Gender and Social Inclusion (GESI) component with an in-depth review of the recommendations of the COVID-Specific Gender Analysis of SMICA concluded by USAID in December 2020. The feedback and insights gained during the workshop were incorporated into SMICA's Year 3 work plan.

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