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for every child

Humanitarian Action for Children

Two unaccompanied Haitian migrant girls are accompanied by a UNICEF staff member on their way to reunite with their parents, after transiting through the Darien jungle, in Panama.

COVID-19, children on the move and other crises in Mexico and Central America

HIGHLIGHTS¹

- Mexico and Central America² face multiple and complex humanitarian situations affecting 4.8 million children³ due to violence, climate shocks, food insecurity, and increasing inequity; all compounded by the health and socioeconomic impacts of COVID-19 and fueling cross-border migration and internal displacement. UNICEF seeks to reach nearly 1.1 million children and their families, including children on the move and host communities, and those in other vulnerable communities affected by the impacts of COVID-19, natural hazards and other crises.
- 2021 was characterized by a dramatic increase of migration flows and the profile of migrants changed from solo male travelers to families with children and unaccompanied children. This truly is a children's crisis. UNICEF requests US\$127.7 million to expand its support to provide humanitarian assistance to the most vulnerable children and support the governments to build shock-responsive systems to mitigate future vulnerabilities. Anticipated results include the continuity of life-saving interventions for the most vulnerable children and families, including health, nutrition, WASH, protection and education, and promoting social protection and cash-based programmes.

KEY PLANNED TARGETS



553,259

primary caregivers receiving infant and young child feeding counselling



284,850

children and women accessing health care



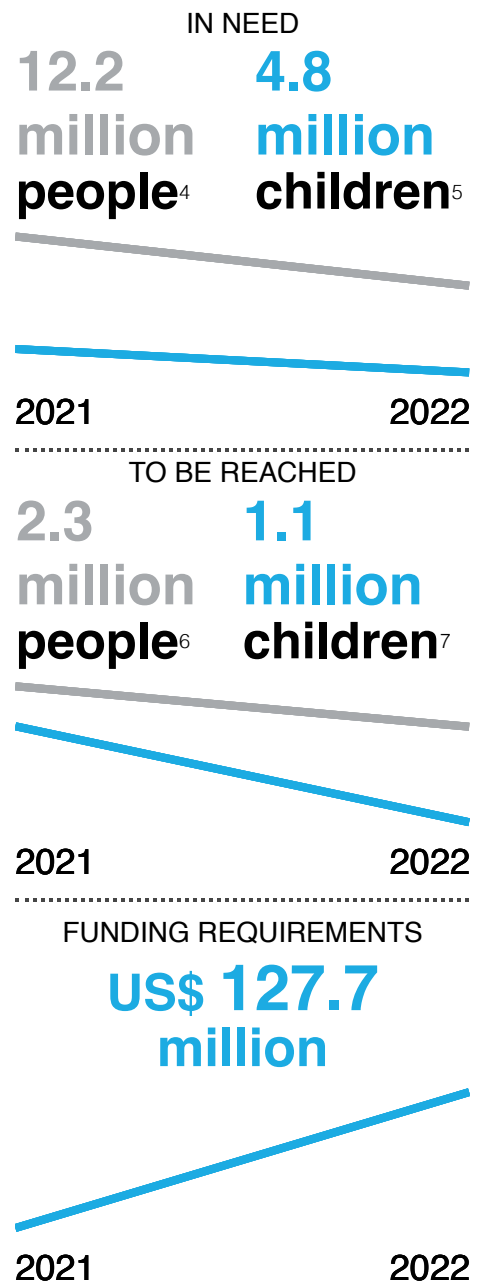
285,115

people accessing a sufficient quantity of safe water



161,503

children/caregivers accessing mental health and psychosocial support



Target population decreased compared to 2021, mainly due to reduced figures for Mexico and Panama, as the 2022 HAC narrowed COVID-19 response only for populations in the context of migration. Figures are provisional and subject to change upon finalization of response planning documents.

HUMANITARIAN SITUATION AND NEEDS

Children in Mexico and Central America are facing multiple protracted crises due to climate shocks,⁸ complex political situations, intensified violence including violence against women and children, food insecurity,⁹ malnutrition,¹⁰ social and economic inequity and limited access to quality essential services, compounded by the health and socioeconomic impacts of COVID-19, fueled by migration and internal displacement. For example, intensifying violence has displaced more than 846,000 Mexicans and Central Americans within their countries.¹¹ One in three internally displaced persons from countries in Central America are children.¹² Without urgent interventions, the well-being and the future of millions of children are at risk. The year 2021 witnessed the dramatic increase of migration flows, which became mixed and multi-directional,¹³ partly due to increased forced/voluntary returns. The profile of migrants changed from young solo-male travelers to families with children as well as many unaccompanied children. Over 132,000 unaccompanied children were apprehended at the southwestern border of the United States between October 2020 and August 2021,¹⁴ representing a fourfold increase compared with the same period in 2020.¹⁵ For many unaccompanied adolescents, fleeing is often the only viable option to survive, as they fear for their life due to death threats and recruitment by gangs.¹⁶ Nearly 19,000 migrant children walked through the dangerous Darien jungle in Panama from South America.^{17,18} This is a children's crisis.

Humanitarian needs of vulnerable children and families add pressure to existing services, often already scarce in remote communities, and overwhelm authorities in transit and destination countries, especially during peaks or mixed mass movements ("caravans").¹⁹

Children and families have been hit hardest by the humanitarian and socioeconomic impacts of the pandemic, including extended school closures,²⁰ disruption of essential services²¹ and intensifying violence against children and women.²² As of September 2021, countries included in this appeal recorded 1.1 million COVID-19 cases and 86,845 deaths.²³ Only 35 per cent of the population in these countries is fully vaccinated against COVID-19,²⁴ and the pandemic resulted in both temporarily slowing down cross-border movements and exacerbating the root causes for migration.²⁵ With the emergence of new variants of the virus, expanding prevention, containment and effective treatment measures are critical to mitigate further negative secondary impact of the pandemic.

SECTOR NEEDS



100,000
children under 5
affected by wasting²⁶



550,000
children in need of
immunization
services²⁷



4.4 million
people need WASH
support²⁸



831,000
children in need of
protection services²⁹



905,000
children in need of
education support³⁰

STORY FROM THE FIELD



In Casa Nuestras Raices, a shelter for unaccompanied migrant children run by Guatemalan authorities with UNICEF support, Luis Alvarado, the psychologist, uses magic as a playful tool to reduce the stress felt by children and adolescents in the shelter, making them discover hidden abilities through tricks. He teaches them that no matter how hard life has hit them, it is always a good time to do things differently – and that trusting in the values of effort and perseverance, like when you want to learn a magic trick, can always give you unexpected joys, because life is like magic.

[Read more about this story here](#)

Luis, a psychologist working at Casa Nuestras Raices shelter for migrant children in Guatemala, uses magic to engage with some boys in the shelter.

HUMANITARIAN STRATEGY

With multiple protracted crises in the region, an increased number of families with children migrate and travel longer journeys in pursuit of a better and safer life. UNICEF's Humanitarian Strategy comprises reinforced coordination among countries and focuses on providing humanitarian assistance and protection to the most vulnerable children, adolescents and women. As the increased flow of migrants overwhelms existing services, UNICEF invests in building local capacities and shock-responsive systems and ensures that cross-cutting issues³¹ (including protection from sexual exploitation and abuse, and accountability to affected populations) contribute to building the "triple nexus" (humanitarian-development-peace).

UNICEF plans to triple its investments in services delivery through multi-sectoral efforts to reach 738,000 people on the move, including 341,000 children (migrants, returnees, displaced) and host communities, by providing humanitarian assistance and support to build shock-responsive systems through key authorities and stakeholders. The deceleration of the COVID-19 pandemic will imply a gradual shift from urgent humanitarian relief to a longer-term approach, focused on local system strengthening.

Guided by the Core Commitments for Children in Humanitarian Action, UNICEF will ensure that 1.5 million vulnerable people, including 741,000 children, are protected from exposure to and the impacts of COVID-19 and other situations such as violence and the effects of climate shocks. Although on a smaller scale than 2021, UNICEF COVID-19 response - aligned with the global strategy³² - will focus on: support to public health responses for prevention; complement and strengthen the efforts of the governments and partners to maintain/restore/scale-up essential services in health, nutrition, WASH, child protection, gender-based violence, early childhood development, education and social protection; disseminate key information to reduce disease transmission and its impact; and make services equally accessible for people with disabilities and available in local languages.

UNICEF's humanitarian response is led by Country Offices in affected countries, building local knowledge, existing partnerships, and extensive networks. They are closely supported by the Regional Office through technical assistance, quality assurance and oversight. UNICEF mobilizes its regional and global network to ensure that adequate staff capacity is made available, including as Global Cluster Lead Agency in WASH, nutrition, and co-lead for education, and the child protection Area of Responsibility. In El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras, UNICEF's humanitarian action is also aligned with these countries' inter-agency multi-crisis/multi-sectoral Humanitarian Response Plans (HRPs).³³

UNICEF's evidence-based advocacy during emergencies is guided by needs-assessment, Humanitarian Performance Monitoring indicators, and evaluations. Grand Bargain commitments³⁴ are mainstreamed, including for localization, strengthening government and local actors' capacities, accountability to affected population mechanisms, and ensuring the quality of humanitarian cash transfers.

2022 PROGRAMME TARGETS



Nutrition

- **8,283** children aged 6 to 59 months with severe acute malnutrition admitted for treatment
- **319,852** children aged 6 to 59 months screened for wasting
- **553,259** primary caregivers of children aged 0 to 23 months receiving infant and young child feeding counselling
- **140,000** children aged 6 to 59 months receiving multiple micronutrient powders



Health

- **284,850** children and women accessing primary health care in UNICEF-supported facilities
- **289** health care facility staff and community health workers trained in infection prevention and control³⁵
- **50,170** children receiving the minimum set of vaccines³⁶
- **2,850** health workers reached with PPE³⁷



Water, sanitation and hygiene

- **285,115** people accessing a sufficient quantity of safe water for drinking and domestic needs
- **91,678** children use safe and appropriate WASH facilities and hygiene services in learning facilities and safe spaces
- **244,122** people reached with hand-washing behaviour-change programmes
- **427,973** people reached with critical WASH supplies



Child protection, GBViE and PSEA³⁸

- **161,503** children and parents/caregivers accessing mental health and psychosocial support
- **187,079** women, girls and boys accessing gender-based violence risk mitigation, prevention and/or response interventions
- **203,973** people who have access to a safe and accessible channel to report sexual exploitation and abuse by aid workers
- **9,420** unaccompanied and separated children accessing family-based care or a suitable alternative



Education³⁹

- **121,687** children accessing formal or non-formal education, including early learning
- **26,800** children/adolescents accessing skills development programmes
- **670** schools implementing safe school protocols (infection prevention and control)⁴⁰
- **105,842** children receiving learning materials



Social protection⁴¹

- **43,890** households reached with cash transfers through an existing government system where UNICEF provided technical assistance and/or funding
- **2,467** households reached with UNICEF funded multi-purpose humanitarian cash transfers
- **13,000** households benefitting from new or additional social transfers from governments with UNICEF technical assistance support



Cross-sectoral (HCT, C4D, RCCE and AAP)

- **3,267,750** people reached through messaging on prevention and access to services⁴²
- **147,200** people with access to established accountability mechanisms

FUNDING REQUIREMENTS IN 2022

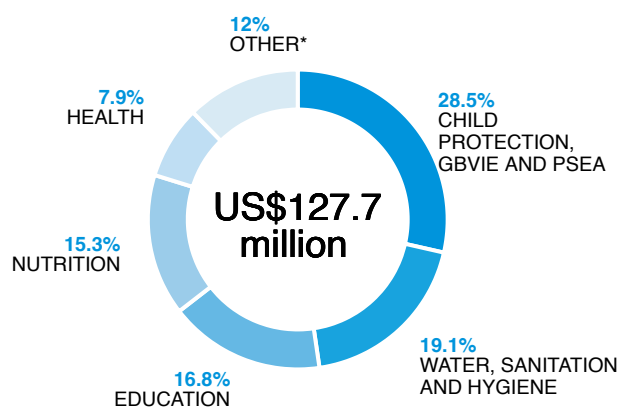
UNICEF requests US\$127.7 million to meet the humanitarian and resilience needs of children and families in Mexico and Central America, including migrants and host communities, and the most affected by COVID-19 and other crises.⁴³ About 48 per cent of requested funds will support the scaling-up of the response for children/families on the move and host communities, (three times higher than 2021 budget); and 52 per cent will respond to humanitarian needs for vulnerable population groups related to COVID-19 and others crises.

Due to the increased scale and complexity of migration, and the multiple crises affecting the region, the funding needs have increased to allow opportune strategic shift of the humanitarian response, from technical assistance and system strengthening for COVID-19 response, to a stronger focus on direct service delivery and supply distribution in response to increased migration. The target population of migration-related response has more than doubled in most of the countries. The emphasis of its COVID-19 response on population on the move and host communities resulted in the reduction of overall targets compared to 2021, mainly in Mexico and Panama.

Funding requirements for El Salvador, Honduras and Guatemala will allow to implement comprehensive multi-sector Humanitarian Response Plans (HRPs).

UNICEF's humanitarian strategy is strongly linked with its regular development programming, and UNICEF will address the urgent needs of the most vulnerable, while contributing to building more resilient and shock-responsive systems: US\$36.4 million is critical to scale up protection services for the most vulnerable women and children; US\$24.4 million to provide access to safe water and hygiene, and good hygiene practices; and US\$21.5 million to allow children to safely access learning opportunities. Funding is also required at the regional level to ensure continuous evaluation, technical support to country offices and regional coordination responsibilities.

Without sufficient, timely flexible and multi-year investments in the region, UNICEF and its partners will be unable to prevent a worsening of the humanitarian situation that could reverse gains secured in the last decades.



Sectors	2022 total requirement (US\$)
Nutrition	19,514,948
Health	10,070,797
Water, sanitation and hygiene	24,440,237
Child protection, GBVIE and PSEA	36,461,780
Education	21,503,535
Social protection	8,991,021
Cross-sectoral (HCT, C4D, RCCE and AAP)	3,546,087
Regional Support	3,200,000
Total	127,728,405

*This includes costs from other sectors/interventions : Social protection (7.0%), Cross-sectoral (HCT, C4D, RCCE and AAP) (2.8%), Regional Support (2.5%).

Sectors ⁴⁴	Belize	Costa Rica	El Salvador	Guatemala	Honduras	Mexico	Panama	Regional Support	2022 total requirement (US\$)
Nutrition	92,800	-	2,500,000	7,459,319	6,661,429	2,552,000	249,400	-	19,514,948
Health	194,605	-	500,000	2,546,200	2,193,472	3,596,000	1,040,520	-	10,070,797
Water, sanitation and hygiene	670,170	1,038,490	1,032,516	5,258,149	12,342,052	2,668,000	1,430,860	-	24,440,237
Child protection, GBV/E and PSEA ⁴⁵	597,980	1,354,590	3,179,850	12,064,000	4,654,000	12,644,000	1,967,360	-	36,461,780
Education	996,247	1,941,666	4,114,254	2,565,505	6,851,463	5,034,400	-	-	21,503,535
Social protection	1,087,651	-	-	1,975,770	4,767,600	1,160,000	-	-	8,991,021
Cross-sectoral (HCT, C4D, ROCE and AAP)	87,957	623,790	673,380	569,560	1,278,200	-	313,200	-	3,546,087
Regional Support ⁴⁶	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	3,200,000	3,200,000
Total	3,727,410	4,958,536	12,000,000	32,438,503	38,748,216	27,654,400	5,001,340	3,200,000	127,728,405

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ENDNOTES

1. UNICEF's public health and socio-economic COVID-19 response, including programme targets and funding requirements, is integrated into the standalone country, multi-country and regional Humanitarian Action for Children appeals. All interventions related to accelerating equitable access to COVID-19 tests, treatments and vaccines fall under the Access to COVID-19 Tools Accelerator (ACT-A) global appeal.
2. This appeal covers Belize, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico and Panama. It covers the humanitarian needs of populations on the move in these countries, including those affected by COVID-19 and the COVID-19-related needs of vulnerable non-migrants in Belize, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras. In Mexico and Panama, the COVID-19 response focuses only on host communities. Other humanitarian needs in El Salvador, Honduras and Guatemala are considered, as comprehensive multi-sector interagency HRP's have been developed for these countries.
3. Estimate based on 2021 interagency planning figures for El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras, and preliminary estimations by UNICEF for other countries part of this appeal.
4. Includes 1.4 million people in need in the context of migration (doubling 2021 estimations), and 10.8 million people with COVID-19 related needs and other situations. UNICEF estimate based on country-level analysis and 2021 Humanitarian Needs Overview for El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras; and preliminary UNICEF estimates for other countries in this appeal. Estimates are preliminary and have decreased in comparison with 2021 as for Panama and Mexico, the 2022 HAC prioritizes only COVID-19-related needs for populations in the context of migration, including host communities most impacted by migration flows.
5. This includes 521,000 children in need in the context of migration (nearly three times the 2021 estimation for this population group), and 4.3 million children with COVID-19 related needs and other situations. UNICEF estimate based on country-level analysis and 2021 HNO for El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras; and preliminary UNICEF estimates for other countries in this appeal.
6. Includes 738,000 people in the context of migration (nearly three times 2021 target), and 1.5 million people with COVID-19 related needs and other situations. Total includes 70,690 people in Belize, 109,050 in Costa Rica, 195,750 in El Salvador, 792,011 in Guatemala, 653,550 in Honduras, 363,150 in Mexico, 79,342 in Panama. Targets are preliminary and have decreased compared to 2021, mainly due to the reduction in targets for Panama and Mexico, where the 2022 HAC prioritizes only COVID-19-related response for populations in the context of migration, including host communities most impacted by migration flows. For the targeted population, the proportion of the migration-related response in this appeal has increased from 9 per cent in 2021 to 33 per cent in 2022. UNICEF is committed to needs-based targeting, which means covering the unmet needs of children; and will serve as the provider of last resort where it has cluster coordination responsibilities.
7. This includes 341,000 children in the context of migration (double the 2021 target), and 741,000 children with COVID-19 related needs and other situations. The total includes 39,895 children in Belize, 77,776 in Costa Rica, 101,950 in El Salvador, 336,377 in Guatemala, 349,900 in Honduras, 151,850 in Mexico, 24,031 in Panama. Targets are preliminary and have decreased compared to 2021 for Panama and Mexico. The 2022 HAC prioritizes only COVID-19-related response for populations in the context of migration, including host communities most impacted by migration flows.
8. Between 2020 and 2021, over 8 million people, including 3 million children, were affected by mid-/large scale disasters in this appeal's countries; among them 7 million affected by the impacts of Eta and Iota storms in 2020. Data from UNICEF, OCHA, and Centre for Research on the Epidemiology of Disasters Database, EM-DAT: The International Disaster Database, CRED, September 2021.
9. At least 7.1 million people, including 2.7 million children, are facing crisis/emergency levels of food insecurity in El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras. UNICEF estimate based on Integrated Food Security Phase Classification reports on these countries from 2021.
10. An estimated 16.6 million people are undernourished in Mesoamerica. FAO, Pan American Health Organization, WFP and UNICEF, Panorama de la seguridad alimentaria y nutricional en América Latina y el Caribe, December 2020.
11. Including total number of IDPs due to conflict/violence in Mexico, Guatemala and Honduras, as of 31 December 2020. IDMC, Country profiles, <https://www.internal-displacement.org/countries> accessed September 2021.
12. Migration and Displacement Country Profiles (MDCP) - UNICEF DATA
13. Includes migration flows across Central America towards North America, forced and voluntary returns of migrants to countries of origin, extra-continental migration from Haiti, Cuba, and countries in Asia and Africa. The situation is further complicated considering the diversity of nationalities and origin of migrants, and the diversity of policies that can be applied for each case.
14. Corresponds to 'encounters' statistics, including Title 8 Apprehensions, Title 9 Inadmissible, and Title 42 Expulsions. U.S. Customs and Border Protection Department of Homeland Security, Southwest Border Migration FY 2021, <https://www.cbp.gov/newsroom/stats/southwest-land-border-encounters>, accessed September 2021.
15. Total of 33,239 unaccompanied children reported between October 2019 and September 2020.
16. UNICEF, UNHCR, Families on the run, December 2020.
17. UNICEF, news note, 2021 records highest ever number of migrant children crossing the Darien jungle towards the US, October 2021.
18. In 2020, despite COVID-19 border closures, 8,600 migrants (1,621 children, 18 per cent) crossed the Darien in their journey to the North. Between January and August 2021, 70,376 migrants crossed the Darien border, drastically increasing between June and September 2021, with an average of 700 to 1,000 people arriving daily, between June and September. In August, more than 25,000 people transited through the Darien, including 4,770 children).
19. Migrant flows can experience abrupt variations and peaks, driven by factors including changes in national/regional regulatory frameworks. Changes in work visa requirements can cause change for a group of migrants (previously in regular situation) who will start to move in search of new locations for their subsistence. A border closer would affect the migration flow in neighbouring countries, which would suffer denser population concentration and/or longer stationary periods. In Northern Central America this creates, since 2018, "migrant caravans" – group of thousands of migrants fleeing violence and poverty, often mobilized through social media.
20. As of October 2021, schools partially closed in Belize, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico and Panama; affecting approximately 24.7 million children.
21. According to UNICEF, as of May 2021, disruptions were still visible in services such as nutrition programmes in schools, nutrition support for pregnant/lactating women, vitamin A supplementation for children 6 to 59 months, access to and/or processing of asylum claims, legal/judicial services for children in contact with the law.
22. GBV remains a significant concern, particularly in Northern Central America. Honduras has the highest femicide rate per 100,000 women in Latin America (6.2), followed by El Salvador (3.3) and Guatemala (2). Humanitarian Needs Overview El Salvador, Guatemala y Honduras, 2021.
23. PAHO, COVID-19 Region of the Americas Update, 24 September 2021.
24. Our world in data, Share of the population fully vaccinated against COVID-19, as of 30 September 2021, www.ourworldindata.org, accessed 3 October 2021.
25. Poverty and lack of opportunities are root causes of migration worsened by COVID-19 impacts. For Central America countries, after positive declines in poverty and extreme poverty rates from 2018 to 2019, especially in El Salvador and Honduras, ECLAC projected rates recorded in Northern Central America at the close of 2020 would exceed those of 2018. The pandemic has impacted the economies of Mexico and Central America, causing a 8.5% reduction in GDP, above the regional -7.7% expected for LAC. ECLAC, Panorama Social de América Latina 2020, 2021.
26. UNICEF/WHO/The World Bank Group Joint Child Malnutrition Estimates: Levels and trends in child malnutrition - key findings of the 2021 edition, UNICEF, WHO and World Bank, May 2021.
27. UNICEF estimate based on PAHO data and UNICEF on number of children missing immunization in 2020, in 7 countries part of this appeal, according to estimated national immunization coverage.
28. Includes people in need of WASH support in El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras, according to 2021 Humanitarian Needs Overview, in absence of inter-agency estimations for other countries part of the appeal.
29. Ibid.
30. Includes children in need of education support in El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras, according to 2021 Humanitarian Needs Overview, in absence of inter-agency estimations for other countries part of the appeal. In addition, at least 24 million children in countries part of this appeal, are affected by partial closure of schools, as of October 2021.
31. Considering also cross-sectoral commitments (gender, disabilities, early childhood development, adolescents participation), climate change and resilience.
32. COVID-19: Strategic preparedness and response plan, 1 February 2021 to 31 January 2022, WHO, February 2021.
33. OCHA, Humanitarian Response Plan, El Salvador, Guatemala & Honduras, August 2021 - December 2022, August 2021.
34. The Grand Bargain is a unique agreement between some of the largest donors and humanitarian organizations, who have committed to getting more means into the hands of people in need and improving the effectiveness and efficiency of humanitarian action.
35. In Honduras.
36. Target decrease in 2022 compared to 2021 is mainly due to reduction of Guatemala target. In 2021, focus was on supporting health centers' cold chain, in 2022 the focus is on supplies procurement and technical support.
37. The decrease of this target in 2022 compared to 2021, is mainly due to the reduction of target in El Salvador not prioritizing this action in 2022.
38. In response to increasingly complex regional migratory context, UNICEF to invest in reinforced focus on assisting children and families on the move (including migrants, returnees, displaced) and host communities, in addition to stronger support to key authorities and stakeholders. Child protection actions and funding requirements will scale up accordingly, some key targets have increased two to four-fold, compared to 2021.
39. While in 2021, a significant proportion of UNICEF efforts were dedicated to support distance learning programmes with higher outreach, in 2022, UNICEF will increase its focus on providing learning opportunities for children on the move and host communities. This direct support can be more costly than virtual/distance education interventions; thus, contributing to lower targets compared to 2021.
40. In Costa Rica and Honduras.
41. In 2021, UNICEF focused on providing technical assistance to government programmes in Guatemala and Honduras. The 2022 targets consider a blended approach that comprises technical assistance to authorities and a higher portion of direct budget funding support to government-led and UNICEF-funded programmes.
42. The population targeted is higher than the total number of people/children to be reached because the target includes mass media outreach.
43. Approximately 48 per cent of this requirement (US\$61.4 million) will be dedicated to scaling up support to children/families in the move and host communities, including in prevention/response to COVID-19 (over three times the 2021 budget); and 52 per cent (US\$66.3 million) will address COVID-19-related humanitarian needs, and others for vulnerable population groups. The latter relates mainly to additional humanitarian needs identified in El Salvador, Honduras and Guatemala, where comprehensive multi-sector HRP's have been developed, which also include needs related to climate change impacts, food insecurity and violence. Funding needs have increased to focus on migration-related response, increasing from approximately US\$18 million in 2021 to US\$61 million in 2022, and the expanded scope to other situations beyond migration and COVID-19, aligned with HRP's.
44. Sectoral amounts include other costs related to advocacy, communication, coordination, planning, monitoring, evaluation, reporting, operations and security.
45. Including US\$1.2 million for PSEA-related actions.
46. Regional Office requirements are spread across all multi-country appeals for the region. Those in this appeal comprise technical assistance and coordination support, preparedness and resilience efforts, and response to a sudden deterioration of needs at the country level.