



Children arrive at the Migrant Reception Station in Panama, after crossing the Darien Jungle. UNICEF supports national efforts to protect the rights of children on the move transiting Panama.

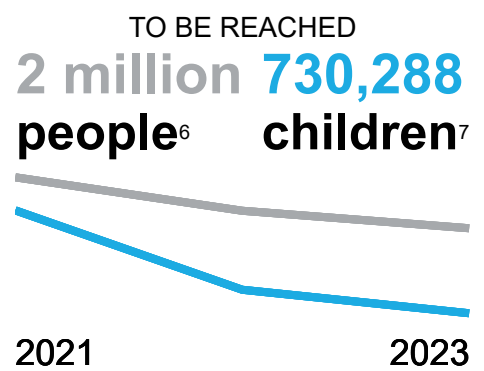
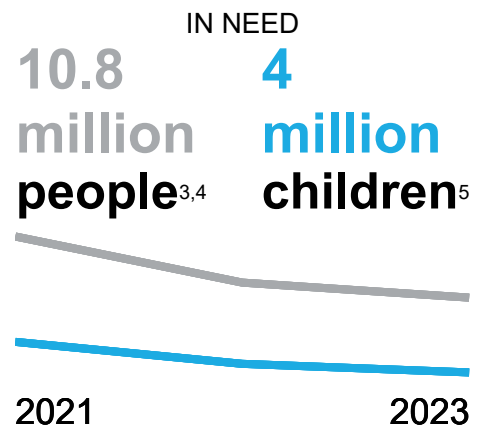
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Humanitarian Action for Children

Mexico and Central America: Children on the move and other crises

HIGHLIGHTS^{1,2}

- Increased and multidirectional migration flows across Mexico and Central America are compounding a humanitarian crisis for children on the move across the subregion. This is a protection crisis. Facing tightened border controls, more families and children travel irregular routes. The journeys can be extremely perilous – such as for those crossing through the Darien Gap – and entail a high risk of abuse, exploitation, and family separation. This threatens children's growth, and their development and well-being.
- The situation of children on the move and vulnerable communities in the subregion is exacerbated by the growing exposure to natural hazards and other effects of climate change, resulting in eroded livelihoods and income sources, malnutrition, and food insecurity. UNICEF estimates that 4 million children will need humanitarian assistance in Mexico and Central America in 2023.
- UNICEF requires US\$142.3 million to provide humanitarian assistance to 2 million people (including 733,000 children) along migratory paths and in vulnerable communities and to support governments and partners in building better shock-responsive systems.



KEY PLANNED TARGETS



112,184

children and women accessing primary healthcare



264,162

women and children accessing gender-based violence mitigation, prevention, response



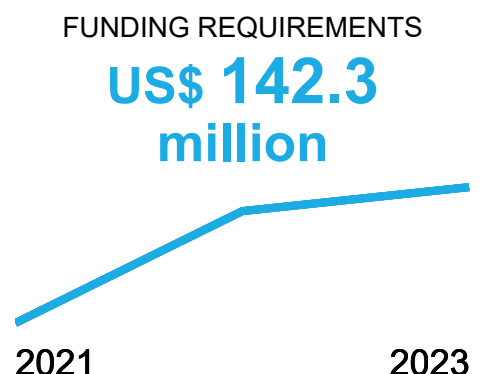
130,670

children accessing formal or non-formal education, including early learning



653,999

people accessing a sufficient quantity and quality of water



Figures are provisional and subject to change upon finalization of the inter-agency needs and planning documents.

HUMANITARIAN SITUATION AND NEEDS

The increased flow of children on the move continues in Central America and Mexico. The movement has become multidirectional, with more families and children returning (both forced and voluntary) and traveling along irregular routes due to tightened border controls. This puts children at risk of abuse, exploitation, and family separation. Children's growth, development, and well-being are under threat in what is truly a children's crisis.

The recovery from the pandemic has been slow and unequal. Poverty remains high, and extreme poverty is expected to worsen in 2023. The situation is compounded by the global disruption of supply chains and inflation triggered by the war in Ukraine and the residual effects of natural hazards. This all challenges access to food, goods, and essential services for the poorest, most shock-prone, migrant families and host communities. In some countries, such as Costa Rica and Mexico, thousands of migrants are settling down each year, adding pressure on the existing services.

Between October 2021 and September 2022, more than 152,000 encounters with unaccompanied children were recorded by authorities at the southwestern border of the United States – a 3 per cent increase from the same period last year.⁸ Over the first months of 2023, 1 in 5 migrants walking through the Darien jungle were children, being the fastest growing group among people fleeing their homes under the threat of violence or migrating in search of better opportunities.⁹

Violence is one of the main drivers of migration in the region. For many children and adolescents, staying home means limited future prospects and the risk of gang recruitment and death. Multiple protracted and compounding crises – due to climate hazards, sociopolitical turmoil, inequity, food insecurity, malnutrition, and limited access to quality essential services – continue to fuel migration and internal displacement in the region.

The humanitarian needs of vulnerable children and families add pressure to existing services, often already scarce or non-existing in remote communities or transit hotspots, and overwhelm local authorities in transit and destination countries, especially during peaks or mixed mass movements. Violence, structural inequity, and disasters uproot children and families within their own countries, and internal displacement is often considered a first step toward migration. In 2022, there were over 900,000 internally displaced people in Mexico, Honduras, and Guatemala alone.¹⁰

SECTOR NEEDS¹¹



2.4 million people in need of health assistance



2.8 million people in need of nutrition assistance



1.5 million children in need of protection services



1.4 million children in need of education support



3.5 million people in need of WASH support

STORY FROM THE FIELD



At the Assistance Center for Migrants and Refugees (CAPMiR), located at the Guatemala-Honduras border, UNICEF and partners assist migrant children and their families. Migrants receive information about safe routes, their rights, access to available protection services, and health care. They can take a shower, wash their clothes, access the internet, re-establish communication with their relatives, and charge their cell phones.

Migrants arriving at this border have survived the Darien jungle, a traumatic experience for children. They walked for eight days in a row, between 10 and 12 hours each day.

[Read more about this story here](#)

After their migratory journey through the Darien Gap, two sisters celebrated their birthdays at the reception center (CAPMiR) located at the border between Guatemala and Honduras.

HUMANITARIAN STRATEGY

With multiple protracted crises in the region, an increasing number of children are migrating and traveling longer journeys in pursuit of a better and safer life. As the increased flow of migrants overwhelms services, together with partners and governments, and guided by the Core Commitments for Children in Humanitarian Action, UNICEF will invest in addressing these acute humanitarian needs – such as access to safe WASH facilities, life-saving supplies, and psychosocial support for children at transit hotspots and reception centres. UNICEF will be a partner in building shock-responsive systems by supporting the creation and roll-out of transitory care or case management models and response protocols, reinforcing referral mechanisms and information systems on child protection issues, enhancing protocols for continuity of education, supporting more resilient WASH facilities in affected areas, and strengthening social protection systems' capacities to adapt in times of crises – including cash programmes.

UNICEF ensures that the most vulnerable migrant children and families receive humanitarian support along their journey by deploying capacities to monitor the situation of children in hotspots. An important component of this are mobile units that provide information, protection, WASH, health, and nutrition services. UNICEF also works to strengthen the capacities of border authorities and partners and supports governments' binational coordination mechanisms, information sharing, and protocols.

UNICEF supports the systematic inclusion of cross-cutting issues, such as protection from sexual exploitation and abuse and accountability to affected populations, as well as a focus on building the humanitarian-development-peace nexus. UNICEF's evidence-based advocacy and humanitarian action are built on investment in information management and knowledge exchange, needs assessments, close monitoring of humanitarian performance, and evaluations. Grand Bargain commitments are mainstreamed across UNICEF strategies: localization, strengthening government and local actors' capacities, accountability to affected populations, and ensuring the quality and impact of humanitarian cash transfers.

UNICEF mobilizes its regional and global networks to ensure that adequate staff capacity is made available, including as the global lead agency for the WASH and Nutrition Clusters and co-lead for the Education sector and the regional Cash Working Group, and the Child Protection Area of Responsibility.

Across programmes, UNICEF ensures accountability for affected population mechanisms and the participation of targeted groups in the design of interventions.

UNICEF will continue its collaboration and coordination with other United Nations agencies, particularly with the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees, and the International Organization for Migration, through joint or complementary advocacy and response efforts addressing the needs of children and families in the subregion.

Progress against the latest programme targets is available in the humanitarian situation reports: <https://www.unicef.org/appeals/mexico/situation-reports>

2023 PROGRAMME TARGETS



Health

- **60,632** children receiving the minimum set of vaccines
- **112,184** children and women accessing primary healthcare in UNICEF-supported facilities



Nutrition

- **254,796** children 6-59 months screened for wasting
- **488,871** primary caregivers of children 0-23 months receiving infant and young child feeding counselling
- **46,300** children 6-59 months receiving micronutrient powder



Child protection, GBViE and PSEA

- **253,045** children, adolescents and caregivers accessing community-based mental health and psychosocial support
- **264,162** women, girls and boys accessing gender-based violence risk mitigation, prevention and/or response interventions
- **527,657** people with safe and accessible channels to report sexual exploitation and abuse by personnel who provide assistance to affected populations
- **19,350** unaccompanied and separated children provided with alternative care and/or reunified



Education

- **130,670** children accessing formal or non-formal education, including early learning¹²
- **121,164** children receiving individual learning materials
- **28,090** children and adolescents accessing skills development programmes



Water, sanitation and hygiene

- **653,999** people accessing a sufficient quantity and quality of water for drinking and domestic needs
- **58,548** children using safe and appropriate WASH facilities and hygiene services in learning facilities and safe spaces
- **263,967** people reached with hand-washing behaviour-change programmes
- **487,860** people reached with critical WASH supplies



Social protection¹³

- **5,400** households benefitting from new or additional social assistance (cash/in kind) measures from governments with UNICEF-technical assistance support
- **13,477** households reached with UNICEF-funded multi-purpose humanitarian cash transfers



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

- **2,764,450** people reached through messaging on prevention and access to services¹⁴
- **383,368** people with access to established accountability mechanisms and interagency reporting platforms

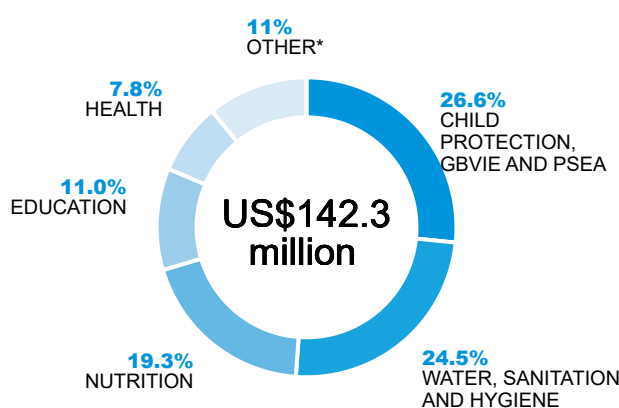
FUNDING REQUIREMENTS IN 2023

UNICEF increased its 2023 appeal to US\$142.3 million, in order to meet the increasingly complex humanitarian needs of children and families in Central America and Mexico. Across all countries, UNICEF will respond to the urgent needs of children on the move regardless of whether they are displaced, in transit or settled in a host country. In addition, UNICEF will support other vulnerable populations in Belize, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua to meet needs related to climate change, food insecurity, and violence, exacerbated by poverty, exclusion, and chronic vulnerabilities.

Across programmes, UNICEF will invest in nexus strategies that safeguard the rights and well-being of children, addressing immediate needs while contributing to building more resilient systems. Funding at the regional level will ensure continuous technical support to country offices for quality programming.

Currently, the funding gaps to carry out life-saving interventions in WASH, education, social protection, health, and nutrition are over 90 per cent. Without sufficient, timely, flexible, and multi-year funds, UNICEF and partners will be unable to maintain access to basic services, such as safe water and child protection services for migrants in borders and hotspots, or maintain the operation of WASH infrastructures in host and other vulnerable communities, including those suffering the effects of extreme weather. Funding is needed to sustain mobile health and nutrition services across migration routes, and for nutrition screening and treatment services to reach hard-to-access vulnerable communities where families lack access to nutritious food and livelihoods. Flexible funding will help UNICEF's ongoing efforts towards more shock-responsive social protection systems – including cash programmes, that can scale up rapidly to reach the most vulnerable families.

UNICEF urges donors to urgently scale up efforts to support this response to assist children at risk due to poverty, situations of violence, unsafe migration routes, and exposure to natural hazards.



*This includes costs from other sectors/interventions : Social protection (5.8%), Cross-sectoral (HCT, SBC, RCCE and AAP) (2.6%), Regional Support (2.5%).

Appeal sector	Original 2023 HAC requirement (US\$)	Revised 2023 HAC requirement (US\$)	Funds available (US\$)	Funding gap (US\$)	Funding gap (%)
Health	7,759,700	11,062,687	614,678	10,448,009	94.4%
Nutrition	15,179,131	27,411,022	1,850,568	25,560,454	93.2%
Child protection	40,463,358	37,896,840	4,111,025	33,785,815	89.2%
Education	18,702,008	15,615,650	3,379,426	12,236,224	78.4%
WASH	17,781,063	34,884,872	256,364	34,628,508	99.3%
Social protection	7,260,396	8,227,880	297,657	7,930,223	96.4%
Cross-sectoral	3,268,941	3,700,959	207,386	3,493,573	94.4%
Regional Support	3,520,000	3,520,000	1,017,837	2,502,163	71.1%
Total	113,934,597	142,319,910	11,734,941	130,584,969	91.8%

Sectors ¹⁵	Belize	Costa Rica	El Salvador	Guatemala	Honduras	Mexico	Nicaragua	Panama	Regional Support	2023 total requirement (US\$)
Health	696,000	-	2,157,600	806,431	1,989,400	3,828,000	805,736	779,520	-	11,062,687
Nutrition	1,276,000	33,640	3,016,000	8,862,919	10,216,701	2,668,000	902,762	435,000	-	27,411,022
Child protection, GBV/E and PSEA	1,077,640	1,496,400	3,132,000	12,328,120	4,780,360	10,730,000	2,082,200	2,270,120	-	37,896,840
Education	422,820	1,139,505	2,183,115	3,379,010	4,814,000	2,900,000	742,400	34,800	-	15,615,650
Water, sanitation and hygiene	735,150	869,443	2,177,320	7,763,248	15,158,231	4,524,000	1,455,800	2,201,680	-	34,884,872
Social protection	417,600	-	12,760	498,800	7,298,720	-	-	-	-	8,227,880
Cross-sectoral (HCT, SBC, RCCE and AAP)	345,100	359,656	116,000	345,603	232,000	1,363,000	516,200	423,400	-	3,700,959
Regional Support ¹⁶	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	3,520,000	3,520,000
Total	4,970,310	3,898,644	12,794,795	33,984,131	44,489,412	26,013,000	6,505,098	6,144,520	3,520,000	142,319,910

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ENDNOTES

1. COVID-19 remains a Public Health Emergency of International Concern as declared by the World Health Organization in January 2020. On 1 July 2022, UNICEF deactivated its Level 3 Sustained Phase for the global COVID-19 pandemic response. All activities related to COVID-19 pandemic response, including programme targets and funding requirements, have been shifted into regular development programming and operations. While UNICEF's Level 3 emergency response phase of the COVID-19 pandemic was deactivated, the organization is continuing to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on children, their families and their communities and on the social systems they rely on.
2. This appeal covers Belize, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua and Panama. It covers the humanitarian needs of populations on the move in these countries. Other crises covered by this appeal include humanitarian needs related to the impact of armed violence, internal displacement, food insecurity and nutrition, and the residual and ongoing effects of natural hazards and climate-related disasters in Belize, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua. UNICEF's humanitarian appeal is aligned with inter-agency plans active in countries in the subregion, including 2023 Humanitarian Response Plans (HRPs) for El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras, and the Costa Rica and Panama chapters of the 2023-2024 Regional Refugee and Migrant Response Plan for Refugees and Migrants from Venezuela (RMRP).
3. 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.
4. The calculation of the total people in need of humanitarian assistance was derived from the following sources: El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras 2023 Humanitarian Response Plans (HRPs); Belize, Costa Rica, Mexico, Nicaragua, and Panama, estimated by UNICEF based on projections of population move according to official figures, and estimations of populations affected by the residual effects of disasters.
5. Ibid.
6. To minimize double counting, the total people to be reached is the largest sectoral total target. Sectoral total targets are estimated by aggregating targets of indicators that do not overlap, depending on the focus of the activities or geographic scope. The total figure includes 660,000 women, 381,000 girls, and 280,000 people with disabilities. UNICEF aims to cover around 20 per cent of the total people in need, assuming that, as per interagency plans, other partners are covering the remaining caseload. It is worth noting that in the Humanitarian Response Plans (HRPs) for Northern Central America countries, the Food Security sector – which is not covered by UNICEF programmes – stands with the largest needs, targets and funding requirements (34 per cent of the HRP funding ask in El Salvador, 26 per cent in Guatemala, and 47 per cent in Honduras).
7. To minimize double counting, the total children to be reached is the largest sectoral total target. Sectoral total targets are estimated by aggregating targets of indicators that do not overlap, depending on the focus of the activities or geographic scope. The total figure includes 381,000 girls and 102,000 children with disabilities. 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.
8. U.S. Custom and Border Protection, Southwest Land Border Encounters stats, available at <<https://www.cbp.gov/newsroom/stats/southwest-land-border-encounters>>, accessed 15 June 2023.
9. UNICEF, Press release, 'Seven-fold increase in the number of children walking through the Panamanian jungle towards North America this year', 30 March 2023.
10. Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC), Global Internal Displacement Database, available at <<https://www.internal-displacement.org/database/displacement-data>>, accessed 15 June 2023.>
11. Sectoral needs are extracted from the Regional Refugee and Migrant Response Plan (RMRP) 2023-2024 for Mexico, Costa Rica and Panama, and the Humanitarian Response Plans (HRPs) 2023 for El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala.
12. Including through strategies for migrant children in transit (i.e., mobile services).
13. In 2022, UNICEF focused on providing technical assistance to government programmes in Guatemala and Honduras as well as in direct implementation to complement government assistance, particularly focusing on migrant and refugee children and their families. The 2023 targets considers 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.
14. The population targeted is higher than the total number of people/children to be reached because the target includes mass media outreach.
15. Sectoral amounts include other costs related to advocacy, communication, coordination, planning, monitoring, evaluation, reporting, operations and security.
16. Regional Office requirements will cover regional-level resources and initiatives directly impacting UNICEF's response to the situation in Mexico and Central America, including: high-level advocacy, technical assistance, coordination support, information management, evidence generation, capacity building and support for scaling up responses to the sudden deterioration of humanitarian situations at the country level. The cost of actions impacting multiple subregions has been proportionally distributed across all multi-country appeals for the region.