



School girls at Pannipitiya Dharmapala School in Colombo, Sri Lanka, wash their hands as part of a UNICEF activity supporting the safe opening of schools.

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Humanitarian Action for Children

South Asia

HIGHLIGHTS

- South Asia is facing a vicious cycle of cascading risks due to the rapid spread of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19), as well as disasters such as cyclone and monsoon floods, which affected over 70 million people (36 per cent children) in 2020.²
- The economic downturn, including rising unemployment and falling remittances, has placed the most vulnerable groups, such as migrant workers and day labourers, at risk of hunger and falling back into poverty.
- Some 600 million children in the region are at risk as the COVID-19 pandemic and its socio-economic impacts and related service disruptions threaten to wipe out decades of development gains related to children's health, education and protection.³
- UNICEF is requesting US\$18.4 million to provide life-saving humanitarian assistance in the region, particularly in Bhutan, Maldives and Sri Lanka. This includes supporting safe learning, health care, protection and treatment for malnutrition, and strengthening social protection systems. Three countries are directly covered by this regional appeal.¹

IN NEED⁴



1 million
children under 5 years
are malnourished⁵



500,000
people need access to
health services⁶



1 million
people require safe
water and sanitation
services⁷



5 million
children require safe
learning
environments⁸

FUNDING REQUIREMENTS²¹

**US\$ 18.4
million**

2017

2021



This map does not reflect a position by UNICEF on the legal status of any country or territory or the delimitation of any frontiers. The countries in light blue are embedded in this regional appeal. The countries in dark blue have corresponding standalone appeals or are covered under crisis appeals.

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

HUMANITARIAN SITUATION

South Asia is facing a vicious cycle of cascading risks due to the rapid spread of COVID-19 and natural disasters. The intersection between COVID-19, conflict and disasters, such as the 2020 monsoon floods, landslides, droughts and Cyclone Amphan, have generated crises on top of crises.¹⁰ The combined effect of extreme weather events and the health and economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic have hit communities hard and rendered them more vulnerable and exposed to the spread of disease.

Following the heavy monsoon rains of 2020, over 20 million people (36 per cent children) were affected by flooding in the region.¹¹ Cyclone Amphan affected more than 70 million people and damaged over 400,000 homes.¹² In Sri Lanka, the high levels of wasting (15.1 per cent) and stunting (17 per cent),⁹ frequent droughts and floods, significant food insecurity and loss of income due to COVID-19 are likely to increase rates of malnutrition among women and young children.

High poverty levels, unplanned human settlements, unsafe building practices and high population density, particularly in urban areas, have left populations in South Asia particularly vulnerable. South Asia is home to the world's biggest slums – an estimated 130 million people live in informal urban settlements in the region¹³ – and some of the most polluted cities in the world, creating significant risks for children. These fragile environments, combined with critical socio-economic vulnerabilities, can give rise to poverty, undernourishment and marginalization.

Due to economic recession and other lockdown measures, millions of people living in poverty, particularly migrant labourers from small countries such as Bhutan, Maldives and Sri Lanka, have lost their jobs and are in urgent need humanitarian assistance to cope with both the pandemic and the impacts of disasters.

HUMANITARIAN STRATEGY

In line with government and inter-agency response plans and the Core Commitments for Children in Humanitarian Action, the UNICEF Regional Office for South Asia will provide an integrated, multi-sector response to build resilience, strengthen systems to prepare for and respond to crises, and link humanitarian action with development programmes. This will include promoting risk communication and community engagement; establishing infection prevention and control measures to prevent the spread of disease; advocating for increased investment in social protection measures and gender-responsive programming to shield poorer families from the worst impacts of the looming economic recession; and delivering essential health, education, child protection and nutrition services for women and children.

UNICEF will prioritize strengthening education systems through safe back-to-school campaigns to ensure that prolonged school closures do not exacerbate gaps in children's learning and development and inequities, particularly between boys and girls and rural and urban areas.

Recognizing the specific issues facing women, adolescents and children in emergencies, the regional strategy will engage directly with women and youth leaders and community-based organizations and integrate gender-based violence prevention and response across sectors.

In the context of repeated shocks and risks, UNICEF will continue to localize its humanitarian response in the region. This will include building local emergency capacities, promoting accountability to affected populations, providing emergency cash transfers and developing shock-responsive social protection mechanisms that both respond to crises and build community resilience.

STORY FROM THE FIELD



Dechen Wangmo, 11, is among the more than 32,000 children across Bhutan with limited or no access to the e-learning programmes developed to ensure education continuity during the COVID-19 pandemic. Her story reflects the challenges faced by children who have fallen through the cracks of the digital divide and their desire to continue learning.

Dechen lives with her grandmother and watches her lessons on national television at a neighbour's home. She uses a classmate's phone to access Google classroom and gets help from a senior student to learn the lessons provided in self-instructional materials.

Dechen Wangmo, 11, with a copy of the self-instructional materials that UNICEF and the Ministry of Education printed and distributed to ensure learning continuity in Bhutan.

COVID-19 REGIONAL RESPONSE

Bhutan, Maldives, Sri Lanka

HUMANITARIAN SITUATION (COVID-19)

With 5 million confirmed cases of COVID-19, South Asia is one of the worst affected regions in the world.¹⁵ The rapid rise in the number of cases and growing demands for health care are threatening to completely overwhelm health systems and undermine service delivery. With an additional 432,000 under-five deaths projected by the end of 2020, infant mortality could increase for the first time in decades due to the impacts of COVID-19, reductions in routine health service coverage and increasing child wasting.¹⁶

The region is also facing economic recession, with its worst economic performance in the past 40 years. Projections indicate that regional growth will decline from 6.3 per cent to 1.8–2.8 per cent in 2020.¹⁷ Small countries such as Bhutan, Maldives and Sri Lanka that depend on tourism and remittances from migrant labour have been heavily affected. By early May, 30 per cent of families in Sri Lanka had reduced their food consumption and a similar number had lost their income.¹⁸ Without expansive social protection measures, the pandemic will exacerbate inequality and disproportionately impact the poor. In addition, 430 million children are unable to attend school and must rely on remote or home-based learning due to pandemic mitigation measures.¹⁴

HUMANITARIAN STRATEGY (COVID-19)

The UNICEF COVID-19 response strategy in South Asia draws on key lessons learned from the ongoing response, builds on current investments and is aligned with government and inter-agency response plans, including economic recovery plans.

Given the dynamic context and continuing rise in cases, UNICEF will prioritize both outbreak control – reducing human-to-human transmission of COVID-19 – and efforts to mitigate the pandemic's impacts on children, adolescents, youth and women, including disruptions to essential protection, health, nutrition, water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) and education services.

UNICEF will also focus on strengthening and preparing the health care system for a second wave of COVID-19 cases and a possible vaccine roll out. The regional strategy also prioritizes risk communication and community engagement and infection prevention and control in health and WASH facilities; and ensures the continuity of services and access to supplies in high-risk communities affected by the pandemic and natural disasters. Working with governments and other partners, UNICEF will also promote access to continuous education, support child protection services, provide cash transfers and address gender-based violence and abuse.

Progress against the 2020 programme targets is available in the humanitarian situation reports:

<https://www.unicef.org/appeals/rosa/situation-reports>

2021 PROGRAMME TARGETS¹⁹



Nutrition

- **5,000** primary caregivers of children aged 0 to 23 months receiving infant and young child feeding counselling
- **765,000** children aged 6 to 59 months receiving multiple micronutrient powders



Health

- **3,000** children aged 6 to 59 months vaccinated against measles
- **150,000** children and women accessing primary health care in UNICEF-supported facilities



Water, sanitation and hygiene

- **275,000** children accessing appropriate water, sanitation and hygiene facilities and hygiene services in learning facilities and safe spaces
- **300,000** people reached with critical water, sanitation and hygiene supplies (including hygiene items) and services



Child protection, GBViE and PSEA²⁰

- **85,000** children and caregivers accessing mental health and psychosocial support
- **30,000** women, girls and boys accessing gender-based violence risk mitigation, prevention or response interventions
- **45,000** people with access to safe channels to report sexual exploitation and abuse



Education

- **545,000** children accessing formal or non-formal education, including early learning
- **30,000** children/adolescents accessing skills development programmes



Social protection and cash transfers

- **300,000** households benefiting from new or additional social transfers from governments with UNICEF technical assistance



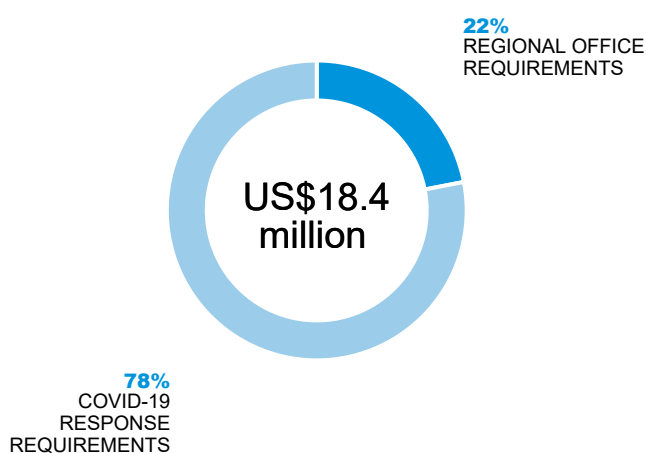
C4D, community engagement and AAP

- **900,000** people participating in engagement actions for social and behavioural change

FUNDING REQUIREMENTS IN 2021

UNICEF requires US\$18.4 million to support government efforts and interventions to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in South Asia; facilitate the provision of critical supplies and continuous access to health services; and respond to the socio-economic impacts of the disease. The funding requirement reflects escalating needs related to the spread of COVID-19 in South Asia and the impact of disasters such as monsoon floods, droughts and cyclones.

Given the worsening situation, additional funding is urgently needed to support governments, communities and affected children; scale up infection prevention and control interventions; support preparedness and response to the pandemic; support government service delivery systems; and respond to the social impacts of the pandemic, which threaten to reverse development gains. The funding will be used to promote safe learning environments and safely bring children back to school; protect children, including through psychosocial support and gender-based violence services; provide children with treatment for malnutrition and vital health services; and provide households with social cash transfers.



Sector	2021 requirements (US\$)
Regional office requirements	4,050,000
Preparedness and disaster reduction	750,000
Emergency response	2,500,000
Regional office technical capacity	800,000
COVID-19 response requirements	14,397,360
Nutrition	1,909,400
Health	3,877,160
Water, sanitation and hygiene	2,415,800
Child protection, GBViE and PSEA	1,750,800
Education	1,779,600
Social protection and cash transfers	1,004,600
C4D, community engagement and AAP	1,660,000
Total	18,447,360

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ENDNOTES

1. The three countries directly covered by this regional appeal are Bhutan, Maldives, Sri Lanka.
2. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 'Asia and the Pacific: Weekly regional humanitarian snapshot (19 - 25 May 2020)', OCHA, 26 May 2020.
3. United Nations Children's Fund, 'Lives Upended: How COVID-19 threatens the futures of 600 million South Asia children', UNICEF, June 2020.
4. The "in need" figures reflect pressing needs in the major sectors that UNICEF supports for all countries in the region.
5. This figure consolidates the needs from Bhutan (20,000), Maldives (10,000) and Sri Lanka (970,000). This was calculated by UNICEF in collaboration with government counterparts based on the current COVID-19 response.
6. This figure consolidates the needs from Bhutan (60,000), Maldives (5,000) and Sri Lanka (435,000). This was calculated by UNICEF based on the current response and projections for 2021.
7. This figure consolidates the needs from Bhutan (140,000), Maldives (75,000) and Sri Lanka (800,000).
8. This figure consolidates the education needs from Bhutan (180,000), Maldives (75,000) and Sri Lanka (4,750,000).
9. Global Nutrition Report, 'Sri Lanka Nutrition Profile', 2020, <<https://globalnutritionreport.org/resources/nutrition-profiles/asia/southern-asia/sri-lanka/#profile>>, accessed 29 September 2020.
10. United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, 'Protecting the Most Vulnerable to Cascading Risks from Climate Extremes and the COVID-19 in South Asia', UN ESCAP, 2020.
11. International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, '17.5 million affected by floods and threatened by disease in South Asia', IFRC, 6 August 2020.
12. 'Asia and the Pacific: Weekly regional humanitarian snapshot (19 - 25 May 2020)'.
13. United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, 'Asia Disaster Report – The Disaster Riskscape Across Asia-Pacific: Pathways for resilience, inclusion and empowerment', UN ESCAP, 22 August 2019.
14. Ibid.
15. South Asia Association of Regional Cooperation Disaster Management Centre, 'Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) Situation Report – 115', SAARC, 12 July 2020.
16. Robertson, Timothy, et al., 'Early Estimates of the Indirect Effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Maternal and Child Mortality in Low-income and Middle-income Countries: A modelling', The Lancet, vol. 8, no. 7, 12 May 2020.
17. World Bank, 'The Economic Impact of COVID-19 on South Asia: The cursed blessing of public banks', The World Bank, Washington, D.C., 2020.
18. United Nations Children's Fund, 'Lives Upended: How COVID-19 threatens the futures of 600 million South Asia children', UNICEF, June 2020.
19. This section reflects the consolidated targets of the countries included in the regional appeal only.
20. Due to space constraints, the following acronyms appear in the appeal: GBViE (gender-based violence in emergencies); PSEA (prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse); C4D (communication for development); and AAP (accountability to affected populations).
21. The South Asia regional appeal for 2017 includes the funding requirements for UNICEF Bangladesh and UNICEF Pakistan and the 2018 regional appeal includes the funding requirements for UNICEF Pakistan.