



At a UNICEF-supported safe space located in Paso Canoas, Costa Rica, at the border with Panama, children on the move receive psychosocial support and other services.

unicef 

for every child

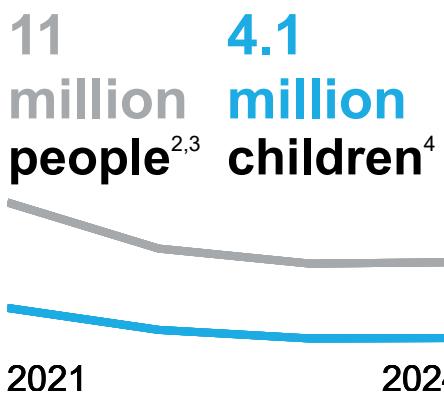
Humanitarian Action for Children

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

HIGHLIGHTS¹

- More families with children are migrating across Mexico and Central America, fleeing poverty and violence, a phenomenon that is pushing the number of children and families on the move transiting the subregion to record highs. Climate-related events (e.g., the El Niño weather pattern) and other crises threaten areas already affected by food insecurity and facing effects of past disasters. UNICEF estimates that 4.1 million children will need humanitarian assistance in Mexico and Central America in 2024.
- UNICEF will assist children on the move, in transit or returned, and those in host communities whose services are overstretched; and will sustain basic services and protection in communities affected by violence, displacement, food insecurity, malnutrition and climate-related disasters.
- UNICEF requires \$153 million to support 2.1 million people (including nearly 710,000 children). Protection services for women and children on the move and restoration and improvement of critical health, education and WASH infrastructure and services in other affected communities are priorities in 2024.

IN NEED



TO BE REACHED



KEY PLANNED TARGETS



465,371

primary caregivers receiving infant and young child feeding counselling



471,590

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



195,892

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



1 million

people accessing a sufficient quantity and quality of water

FUNDING REQUIREMENTS

US\$153 million

Year	Funding Requirements (US\$ millions)
2021	153
2024	165

HUMANITARIAN SITUATION AND NEEDS

Migration flows across Mexico and Central America are multidirectional and interconnected, with many countries acting simultaneously as places of origin, transit and destination. The number of migrants crossing through the Darien border to Panama hit record-high figures in 2023, with close to 409,000 entries between January and September 2023, nearly three times the number recorded during the same period in 2022.⁸ One in every five migrants walking through the Darien jungle is a child, making children the fastest growing group among people on the move through this border. More families with children are now migrating, attempting to reach the United States. A 38 per cent increase compared with 2022 has been recorded in the number of encounters with individuals in family groups at the southwestern border of the United States.⁹ Migrants, especially children and women, face multiple risks throughout their journey. In surveys conducted at borders in Panama, one third of interviewed migrants reported experiencing theft, scams or fraud in their journey;¹⁰ at least 222 people on the move have been reported missing across the subregion in 2023 (18 children, 16 women)¹¹ and reports of sexual violence are frequent.¹²

Children on the move require life-saving assistance and protection and access to education, health, nutrition and social protection systems. The humanitarian needs of vulnerable migrant children and families put pressure on existing services that are often already scarce or even nonexistent in remote areas of transit, and overwhelm local authorities and communities in transit and destination countries, especially during peaks of mixed mass movements. Cross-border migration and internal displacement¹³ in Mexico and Central America are triggered by a combination of factors: crime and violence (including high femicide rates¹⁴), lack of opportunities, structural inequity and poverty¹⁵ and consequent poor access to services,¹⁶ climate-related disasters,¹⁷ food insecurity and malnutrition, and other causes.

Adding to the migration crisis and the long-standing vulnerabilities in Central America, approximately 1.7 million people are at increased risk due to El Niño-induced drought conditions. These people are exposed to severe disruptions in access to water, food production and livelihoods, and increased levels of food insecurity and malnutrition for children. All this is occurring in countries where more than 5.6 million people, including 1.9 million children, are already facing significant levels of acute food insecurity (Integrated Food Security Phase Classification Phase 3 or above) and urgently require assistance.¹⁸

SECTOR NEEDS¹⁹



2.2 million

people in need of health assistance



2.7 million

people in need of nutrition assistance



1.5 million

children in need of protection services



1.3 million

children in need of education support



3.3 million

people lack access to safe water

STORY FROM THE FIELD



Elizabeth sits with three of her four children at her home in Belize. Having fled war and violence in her native Honduras some years ago, her family now benefits from UNICEF-supported cash transfers.

In Belize, as part of its support to increase access to social protection programmes for the most vulnerable families, UNICEF implemented a cash plus pilot programme for migrant children through a close partnership with the Ministry of Human Development, Families and Indigenous Peoples' Affairs, Belize Red Cross and DigiWallet Ltd. Vulnerable families were selected to receive BZ\$800 (US\$400) for each child in four disbursements, using an innovative payment mechanism through a local mobile wallet provider. Through this public/private partnership, UNICEF supports families' financial independence to address their priority needs and make immediate tangible improvements in the lives of children.

[Read more about this story here](#)

As the increased flow of migrants across Mexico and Central America continues, straining national and local services, UNICEF will continue working alongside governments and partners, providing children and families with access to basic services throughout their migration journey. These efforts are guided by the Core Commitments for Children in Humanitarian Action. UNICEF will ensure integrated interventions to facilitate access to water and sanitation, education, health, nutrition and child protection services in host communities.

In 2024, UNICEF will foster the humanitarian–development–peace building nexus by strengthening the capacities of border authorities and local partners, supporting governments' binational coordination mechanisms, facilitating information sharing and jointly developing protocols and tools for the care of children on the move, among other efforts.

UNICEF and partners support policies and provide services to assist children and families who face hardship, exploitation, abuse and very high risk to their health and safety on the irregular migration journey. Such support includes strengthening national/local capacities for protection for migrant and refugee children and working in communities, shelters and reception centres to provide psychosocial support or referral to specialized child protection and gender-based violence services. UNICEF also raises awareness about the risks of irregular migration and its impact on children.

In support to authorities and partners to expand access to basic services for children on the move and other vulnerable groups, UNICEF provides technical support to improve the reach and effectiveness of humanitarian cash transfer programmes, supports strengthening of local health/nutrition services, implements programmes to identify out-of-school children and promote their educational reintegration, backs initiatives to provide migrant children with legal identification and raises awareness to fight discrimination against migrants.

In communities still recovering from the impacts of climate change-related events, UNICEF will continue working to restore basic services and infrastructure (including water supply, health and education), ensuring that these are resilient and better prepared to face future shocks.

In 2024, UNICEF will continue supporting the systematic inclusion of cross-cutting issues in its programming,²² and Grand Bargain commitments will be mainstreamed across strategies: localization, strengthening government and local actors' capacities, accountability to affected populations and ensuring the quality and impact of humanitarian cash transfers. UNICEF ensures the participation of targeted groups in the design of interventions. UNICEF mobilizes regional and global networks to ensure that adequate staff capacity is made available when needed, including through leadership/co-leadership of the WASH, Nutrition, and Education sectors, the regional Cash Working Group and the Child Protection Area of Responsibility.

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



Health (including public health emergencies)

- 171,000 children and women accessing primary health care in UNICEF-supported facilities
- 79,132 children receiving the minimum set of vaccines²³



Nutrition

- 289,296 children 6-59 months screened for wasting
- 465,371 primary caregivers of children 0-23 months receiving infant and young child feeding counselling
- 46,773 children 6-59 months receiving micronutrient powder



Child protection, GBViE and PSEA

- 297,845 children, adolescents and caregivers accessing community-based mental health and psychosocial support
- 471,590 women, girls and boys accessing gender-based violence risk mitigation, prevention and/or response interventions
- 532,731 people with safe and accessible channels to report sexual exploitation and abuse by personnel who provide assistance to affected populations
- 30,625 unaccompanied and separated children provided with alternative care and/or reunified



Education

- 195,892 children accessing formal or non-formal education, including early learning
- 117,618 children receiving individual learning materials
- 144,000 children and adolescents accessing skills development programmes
- 16,860 teachers trained on EiE including psychosocial support, education preparedness and response



Water, sanitation and hygiene

- 1,033,597 people accessing a sufficient quantity and quality of water for drinking and domestic needs
- 107,596 children using safe and appropriate WASH facilities and hygiene services in learning facilities and safe spaces
- 264,557 people reached with handwashing behaviour-change programmes
- 532,386 people reached with critical WASH supplies



Social protection

- 5,400 households benefitting from new or additional social assistance (cash/in-kind) measures from government-funded programmes with UNICEF technical assistance support



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

- 13,647 households reached with UNICEF-funded humanitarian cash transfers (including for social protection and other sectors)
- 2,998,200 affected people (children, caregivers, community members) reached with timely and life-saving information on how and where to access available services²⁴
- 375,080 people with access to established accountability mechanisms and interagency reporting platforms

FUNDING REQUIREMENTS IN 2024

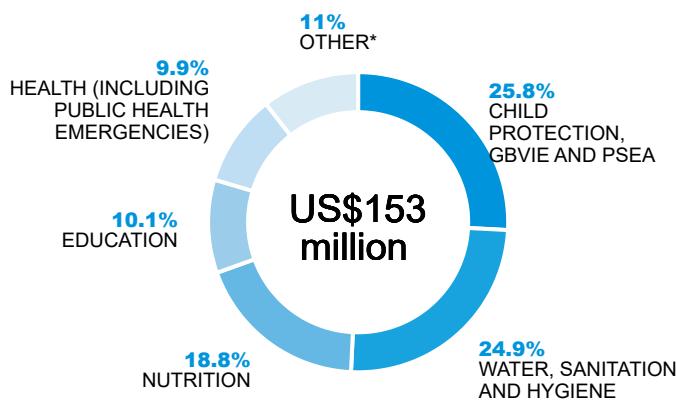
In 2024, UNICEF requires \$153 million to address the urgent needs of the growing numbers of children and families on the move in Central America and Mexico; and to assist other vulnerable communities affected by violence, climate threats or food insecurity.²⁵

In all countries that are part of this appeal, UNICEF will respond to the needs of children on the move regardless of whether they are displaced, in transit or settled in a host country. Through dedicated field presence and close work with local partners, UNICEF will ensure targeted upstream and downstream support to local systems and authorities in their efforts to assist children on the move and host communities.

Other vulnerable populations will also be supported in Belize, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua. UNICEF will invest in nexus strategies that safeguard the rights and well-being of children, contributing to building more resilient systems.

Funding at the regional level will ensure continuous technical support to country offices for quality programming and will enable rapid deployment of key capacities to the field, in case of urgent gaps or a deterioration in the situation.

Without sufficient, timely, flexible and multi-year funding, UNICEF and its partners will be unable to maintain access to basic services, such as safe water, education and child protection services for migrants in hotspots and host communities; ensure that children on the move access education opportunities; and ensure the continuous access to health and nutrition services across migration routes and hard-to-access communities. Flexible funding will help UNICEF's ongoing efforts to promote more shock-responsive social protection systems – including cash programmes that can scale up rapidly to reach the most vulnerable families. Urgent support is also needed for other vulnerable populations whose humanitarian needs remain highly invisible, such as those of internally displaced persons or repatriated migrants.



*This includes costs from other sectors/interventions : Cross-sectoral (HCT, SBC, RCCE and AAP) (5.6%), Social protection (2.5%), Regional Support (2.4%).

Sectors	2024 total requirement (US\$)
Health (including public health emergencies)	15,122,252
Nutrition	28,728,680
Child protection, GBViE and PSEA	39,527,690
Education	15,382,590
Water, sanitation and hygiene	38,142,321
Social protection	3,845,226
Cross-sectoral (HCT, SBC, RCCE and AAP)	8,574,640
Regional Support	3,696,000
Total	153,019,399

Sectors ²⁶	Belize	Costa Rica	El Salvador	Guatemala	Honduras ²⁷	Mexico	Nicaragua	Panama	Regional support	2024 total requirement (US\$)
Health (including public health emergencies)	595,950	631,493	2,265,480	846,752	5,000,000	4,019,400	788,777	974,400	-	15,122,252
Nutrition	1,126,650	200,000	3,166,800	9,306,064	10,727,536	2,801,400	856,480	543,750	-	28,728,680
Child protection, GBVIE and PSEA ²⁸	924,636	1,271,500	3,288,600	12,944,526	5,019,378	11,266,500	1,974,900	2,837,650	-	39,527,690
Education	380,538	300,000	2,292,271	3,547,961	5,054,700	3,045,000	762,120	-	-	15,382,590
Water, sanitation and hygiene	661,635	1,312,945	2,286,186	8,151,410	16,821,055	4,750,200	1,406,790	2,752,100	-	38,142,321
Social protection	-	-	13,398	-	3,831,828	-	-	-	-	3,845,226
Cross-sectoral (HCT, SBC, RCCE and AAP) ²⁹	663,810	377,638	121,800	886,624	4,075,428	1,431,150	488,940	529,250	-	8,574,640
Regional Support ³⁰	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	3,696,000	3,696,000
Total	4,353,219	4,093,576	13,434,535	35,683,337	50,529,925	27,313,650	6,278,007	7,637,150	3,696,000	153,019,399

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ENDNOTES

1. 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. Also covered are 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. Preliminary estimates have been included, to ensure that UNICEF's humanitarian appeal is aligned with inter-agency plans, including 2024 Humanitarian Response Plans for El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras, and the Costa Rica and Panama chapters of the Regional Refugee and Migrant Response Plan for Refugees and Migrants from Venezuela. Key planning figures will be updated once inter-agency plans are released.
2. 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.
3. Preliminary figures, estimated by revisiting 2023 numbers. The calculation of the total number of people in need is estimated on the basis of the following sources: El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras 2023 Humanitarian Response Plans; for Belize, Costa Rica, Mexico, Nicaragua and Panama, estimates by UNICEF based on projections of population movements according to official figures, and estimates of populations affected by the residual effects of disasters.
4. Ibid.
5. To minimize double counting, the total number of 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 780,000 women, 373,000 girls and 280,000 people with disabilities. UNICEF aims to cover around 20 per cent of the total number of people in need, assuming that, as per inter-agency plans, other partners and authorities are covering the remaining caseload. It is worth noting that in the 2023 Humanitarian Response Plans 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 (at 34 per cent of the Humanitarian Response Plan funding ask in El Salvador, 26 per cent in Guatemala, and 47 per cent in Honduras).
6. 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. To minimize double counting, the total number of 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 number of children to be reached includes 373,000 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. Migración Panamá, Estadísticas – Tránsito Irregular por Darién 2022 – 2023, available at <www.migracion.gob.pa/inicio/estadisticas>.
9. U.S. Custom and Border Protection, Southwest Land Border Encounters statistics, available at <www.cbp.gov/newsroom/stats/southwest-land-border-encounters>.
10. Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), 'Mixed Movements Official Data – Darien Province, Panama-Colombia Border', August 2023.
11. United Nations Issue-based Coalition (IBC) on Human Mobility, IBC Human Mobility – Monthly update as of 30 June 2023, July 2023.
12. Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) assisted 206 survivors of sexual violence between January and July 2023. Source: MSF, El Darién: "No damos abasto", press release, 30 August 2023.
13. By the end of 2022, there were more than 943,000 internally displaced persons in Mexico and Central America, 98 per cent displaced due to conflict or violence. Source: Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC), 2023 Global Report on Internal Displacement: Internal displacement and food security, IDMC and Norwegian Refugee Council, May 2023.
14. Honduras, Belize and El Salvador report some of the highest femicide rates per 100,000 women, and Mexico ranks second in the number of femicides in the region. Economic Commission for Latin America, Gender Equality Observatory for Latin America and the Caribbean, available at <<https://oig.cepal.org/en/indicators/femicide-or-feminicide>>, accessed 28 September 2023.
15. An estimated 13 million people face multidimensional poverty in the subregion. Oxford Poverty & Human Development Initiative and United Nations Development Programme, 'Global Multidimensional Poverty Index 2023: Unstacking poverty – Data for high-impact action', UNDP and OPHI, 2023.
16. For instance: completion rates for upper secondary school are just 35 per cent in El Salvador, 26 per cent in Guatemala and 33 per cent in Honduras (UNICEF, Child Alert: The changing face of child migration in Latin America and the Caribbean – A region like no other', September 2023). There are large population groups accessing water sources that are not free from contamination, as in Honduras (65 per cent), Mexico (57 per cent) or Guatemala (42 per cent) (Source: World Health Organization and UNICEF, Joint Monitoring Programme for Water Supply, Sanitation and Hygiene: Estimates for drinking water, sanitation and hygiene services by country (2000-2022), March 2023).
17. Between January 2022 and September 2023, more than 5.4 million people (2 million children) were affected by 23 disasters in Mexico and Central America. EM-DAT, CRED/UCLouvain, Brussels, Belgium, The International Disaster Database, available at <<https://public.emdat.be/>>.
18. Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC), 'Tri-national Border of Rio Lempa: Acute Food Insecurity Situation February - May 2023 and Projections for June – September 2023 and October 2023 – January 2024', April 2023. IPC, 'Guatemala: Acute Food Insecurity Situation March to May 2023 and Projections for June – August 2023 and September 2023 – February 2024', June 2023. IPC, 'Honduras: Acute Food Insecurity Situation December 2022 – February 2023 and Projections for March – May 2023 and June – August 2023', May 2023.
19. Sectoral needs are extracted from the Regional Refugee and Migrant Needs Analysis 2024 for Costa Rica, Mexico and Panama; and the Humanitarian Response Plans 2023 for El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras.
20. UNICEF is committed to empowering local responders in humanitarian crises in a variety of ways. The revised Core Commitments made investing in strengthening the capacities of local actors in the humanitarian response a mandatory benchmark for UNICEF action. A more localized response will improve humanitarian action and is fundamental to achieving better accountability to affected populations.
21. This appeal is aligned with the revised Core Commitments for Children in Humanitarian Action, which are based on global standards and norms for humanitarian action.
22. Overarching commitments: preparedness, coordination, supply and logistics, humanitarian access, protection from sexual exploitation and abuse, accountability to affected populations. Cross-sectoral commitments: gender, disabilities, early childhood development, adolescents development and participation.
23. Depending on context, the minimum set of vaccines may include bacille Calmette-Guérin, diphtheria, tetanus and pertussis, polio and measles, with some countries adding additional vaccines, such haemophilus influenza type B and hepatitis B, depending on their context. UNICEF support may include procurement of supplies or equipment, technical guidance, training and communication, among other efforts.
24. The population targeted is higher than the total number of people/children to be reached because the target includes mass media outreach.
25. Increased funding asks are mainly due to the growing challenges of the migration response in the region, linked to their scale and their complexity, and to the evident consequences of climate-related events in vulnerable communities (including of storms, floods and drought).
26. Sectoral amounts include costs related to advocacy, communication, coordination, planning, monitoring, evaluation, reporting, operations and security.
27. Among the three 2023 Humanitarian Response Plans in northern Central America, Honduras had the highest funding requirements with \$280.4 million needed for multi-sectoral/multi-crisis response countrywide. With migration trends through Honduras' borders on the rise by the end of 2023, caseload and funding needs for children on the move are likely to increase in 2024.
28. Total budget includes \$26.2 million for child protection; \$10.4 million for gender-based violence in emergencies; and \$2.9 million for protection from sexual exploitation and abuse.
29. The budget under this line item has increased compared with previous years, because all humanitarian cash transfer interventions funded by UNICEF are now here (previously they were included in the social protection line item). The total budget includes \$4.7 million for UNICEF-funded humanitarian cash transfer programmes (in Belize, Guatemala and Honduras); and \$3.8 million for social and behaviour change and accountability to affected populations.
30. Regional Office requirements 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.