Latin America and the Caribbean

Countries in Latin America and the Caribbean are increasingly facing rapid-onset and protracted socio-economic crises with serious humanitarian implications. Risk scenarios project that 18 million people are in need of assistance in 2019, up from 9 million in 2018.\(^1\) Violence, poverty and political turmoil have forced millions to migrate across the region. The Venezuelan migrant crisis is the third largest migration flow globally,\(^2\) with over 4 million people having left the country through regular and irregular channels;\(^3\) and the number of migrants moving through Central America and Mexico – including extra-regional migrants – reached unprecedented peaks in 2019.\(^4\) The region is also extremely prone to natural hazards, with 17 countries at high/very high risk.\(^5\) Between January and July 2019, 15 countries experienced disasters affecting 980,000 people, including 300,000 children.\(^6\) Climate change and human-driven factors are compounding the region’s risks, with devastating impacts. In Central America and Haiti, droughts have led to declining livelihoods and rising commodity prices, resulting in 1.7 million children facing crisis/emergency levels of food insecurity.\(^7\) In Paraguay, intense rains – partly due to extensive deforestation – have affected nearly 300,000 people in 2019.\(^8\) The region is also experiencing a dengue outbreak, with some countries accumulating more cases by the end of July 2019 than in all of 2018.\(^9\)

Regional humanitarian strategy

The UNICEF Latin America and the Caribbean Regional Office will provide direct and remote support to country offices in the region to address the increasing number of complex crises affecting children, emphasizing transboundary situations and the impacts of climate change. This work will ensure strong linkages between humanitarian action and development programming, including by building shock-responsive social services and keeping the protection of children at the centre of humanitarian action. UNICEF will reinforce its partnerships with governments, regional bodies and humanitarian, development and private actors to contribute to collective outcomes and timely responses to the needs of children on the move and children affected by emergencies, while reducing vulnerability and risk over time. UNICEF will prioritize an integrated response to national and regional crises. Emergency preparedness and response capacities will be strengthened through comprehensive risk-informed programming. This will lay the foundations for solid situation analysis and evidence generation, and improved programming, implementation, field monitoring, reporting and evaluation. UNICEF will also build a comprehensive human resources surge and learning strategy to ensure the short-term deployment of highly qualified staff to meet urgent needs through timely and effective humanitarian action on the ground, in line with the revised Core Commitments for Children in Humanitarian Action. UNICEF will place special emphasis on responding to emerging needs associated with internal displacement and migration across Central America and Mexico by scaling up advocacy, technical assistance and service delivery; while also addressing recurrent and chronic situations, such as violence, droughts, food insecurity and malnutrition. UNICEF will also focus on the situation in Colombia, where uncertainty regarding the implementation of the peace accords and the upsurge in violence are putting thousands of children at risk of forced displacement and other protection challenges.\(^10\)

Results from 2019

As of 31 August 2019, UNICEF had US$24.2 million available against the US$16 million appeal.\(^11\) Available funds exceeded the appeal amount thanks to generous donor support in response to unforeseen emergencies in the region throughout the year. This funding allowed UNICEF to provide efficient regional support and scale up the regular programme in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela;\(^12\) provide immediate support to communities affected by violence and forced displacement in Colombia;\(^13\) respond to drought, migration and food insecurity in Central America; and deploy immediate support in the aftermath of Hurricane Dorian in the Bahamas;\(^14\) among other emergencies. UNICEF mobilized 117 deployments (5,247 days) of technical support missions through its rapid response/surge roster.\(^15\) The Regional Office also invested significant effort in supporting emergency preparedness: 24 country offices enhanced the quality of their risk analysis and preparedness plans for emergency response through the Emergency Preparedness Platform; seven high-/medium-risk country offices\(^16\) received direct support to revise and improve their contingency and preparedness plans; and two medium-risk country offices benefited from training and simulation exercises supported by the Regional Office.\(^17\) UNICEF conducted the first regional workshop on gender in humanitarian response in 2019, which fostered knowledge and capacities in 11 country offices.\(^18\) UNICEF-supported risk assessment tools and processes such as INFORM\(^19\) and the Child-Inclusive Caribbean Risk Information Tool\(^20\) enabled governments to tailor their humanitarian responses and long-term adaptation plans to the realities on the ground. UNICEF strengthened national and regional capacities using new tools, including a guide for governments on implementing child-inclusive, resilient and shock-responsive social protection systems, resilient education and integrated water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) approaches in humanitarian action. A new partnership with the Caribbean Disaster Emergency Management Agency led to the signature of a Memorandum of Understanding to enhance preparedness and resilience. Under this framework, a joint protocol for child protection in emergencies was developed as part of the Caribbean Safe School Initiative.\(^21\)
Funding requirements

UNICEF is requesting US$19.5 million to ramp up its regional humanitarian strategy and ensure enhanced coordination and support for emergency preparedness, response and humanitarian/development linkages. Given the scale, uncertainties and complexity of child migration dynamics in Mexico and Central America, UNICEF projects that additional funds will be needed for emergency preparedness and response to support social/child protection systems and service delivery for children at multiple points along the migration journey, especially in El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras. The main focus will be on child protection, comprising access to services, case management and appropriate care models of borders, along transit routes and in urban areas, as well as reintegration services for returned children. Flexible and multi-year funding will allow UNICEF to bolster timely and competent human resources through a reinforced comprehensive surge strategy and stronger evidence and knowledge generation to inform the work on the ground. UNICEF will invest in advocacy and communication strategies to make the case for the most vulnerable children and families and accelerate the achievement of programme results.

Regional funding may be used to respond to situations in countries without a separate Humanitarian Action for Children appeal and that may not benefit from inter-agency appeals.


4 Between October 2018 and July 2019, a total of 760,370 apprehensions – including of 69,157 children – were reported at the southwest border of the United States of America. These figures surpass the last peak in migration registered by the United States in 2014. U.S. Customs and Border Protection, ‘Southwest Border Migration FY 2019’.


9 A separate Humanitarian Action for Children appeal is dedicated to the migration situation from the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela to Colombia and other countries in Latin America and the Caribbean.

10 Available funds include US$9.3 million received against the current appeal and US$14.9 million carried forward from previous years (including US$3.3 million received under the 2016–2017 Humanitarian Action for Children appeal for Zikai). Available funds include contributions to support preparedness, response and resilience actions in Columbia, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, the eastern Caribbean, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Guyana, Honduras, Mexico, Panama, Paraguay and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela.


12 UNICEF Colombia is implementing three Central Emergency Response Fund projects in hard-to-reach conflict-affected communities in Norte de Santander, Chocó, Arauca and Narino departments that aim to reach over 10,000 people with life-saving WASH services, and more than 3,000 girls, boys and pregnant and lactating women with health and nutrition care by the end of 2019.


14 This includes 71 deployments from the Latin America and the Caribbean Regional Office and Latin America and Caribbean country offices and 46 deployments from other country offices and headquarters.


16 These country offices are: UNICEF Bolivia and UNICEF Costa Rica.


18 The INFORM Index for Risk Management is a global, open-source risk assessment for humanitarian crises and disasters. The Latin America and the Caribbean INFORM results are a valuable input to any analysis that supports planning or resource allocation processes at the regional level and regional prevention and preparedness actions and contributes to the implementation of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction.

19 The Caribbean Community Risk Information Tool allows countries the choice to assess risk at various levels, whether nationally, sub-nationally or within communities. This is done by capturing data related to exposure to hazards, the level of vulnerability of populations and the capacity available to mitigate and respond to events.

20 The Memorandum of Understanding between the UNICEF Latin America and the Caribbean Regional Office and the Caribbean Disaster Emergency Management Agency (CDEMA) covers all CDEMA member states where UNICEF operates.

21 This includes US$5 million for the response to migration flows in Central America (focus on El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras) and US$7 million for regional support for response and for other contexts of child Humanitarian Action for Children appeals with countries where UNICEF operates.

22 This includes regional/country-level preparedness to most likely scenarios: climate-related situations, earthquakes, disease outbreaks, violence/civil unrest and migration/displacement, among others.