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. Violence, poverty and political turmoil have forced millions to migrate across the region. The Venezuelan migrant crisis is the third largest migration flow globally, with over 4 million people having left the country through regular and irregular channels; and the number of migrants moving through Central America and Mexico – including extra-regional migrants – reached unprecedented peaks in 2019. The region is also extremely prone to natural hazards, with 17 countries at high/very high risk. Between January and July 2019, 15 countries experienced disasters affecting 980,000 people, including 300,000 children. 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. In Paraguay, intense rains – partly due to extensive deforestation – have affected nearly 300,000 people in 2019. 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.

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.

Results from 2019

As of 31 August 2019, UNICEF had US$24.2 million available against the US$16 million appeal. 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; provide immediate support to communities affected by violence and forced displacement in Colombia; respond to drought, migration and food insecurity in Central America; and deploy immediate support in the aftermath of Hurricane Dorian in the Bahamas; among other emergencies. UNICEF mobilized 117 deployments (5,247 days) of technical support missions through its rapid response/surge roster. 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 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. UNICEF conducted the first regional workshop on gender in humanitarian response in 2019, which fostered knowledge and capacities in 11 country offices. UNICEF-supported risk assessment tools and processes such as INFORM and the Child-Inclusive Caribbean Community Risk Information Tool 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.
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.

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.

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 resource for UNICEF and other humanitarian organizations.


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Further information:

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1 The 2018 figure includes two active humanitarian response plans (HRPs): Colombia (5.4 million people in need, including the regular HRP and an addendum HRP for migration flows) and Haiti (2.8 million people in need). The 2019 figure includes three active HRPs: the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela (7 million people in need), Colombia (5.1 million people in need), Haiti (2.5 million people in need), and the Regional Refugee and Migrant Response Plan (RRMP) for refugees and migrants from the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela (3.6 million people in need). Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, ‘Humanitarian Response Plan, Colombia’, 2018; UNICEF Panama, UNICEF Peru and UNICEF Venezuela.


3 Between January and July 2019, by scaling up programme actions, UNICEF was able to reach over 57,000 people with access to WASH services and more than 32,000 children under 5 years were vaccinated against measles. More information is available in UNICEF situation reports available at <www.unicef.org/appeals/other_emergencies.html#bahamas>, accessed 28 September 2019.

4 UNICEF reported that over 30,000 children under 5 years were vaccinated against measles in 2019.

5 These country offices are: UNICEF Bolivia, UNICEF Colombia, UNICEF Dominican Republic, UNICEF El Salvador, UNICEF Guatemala, and UNICEF Venezuela.

6 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 country offices in the region.

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

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 and family planning, along transit routes and in transit 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 programming results.

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