COVID-19, children on the move and other crises in Mexico and Central America

**HIGHLIGHTS**

- Mexico and Central America face multiple and complex humanitarian situations affecting 4.8 million children due to violence, climate shocks, food insecurity, and increasing inequity; all compounded by the health and socioeconomic impacts of COVID-19 and fueling cross-border migration and internal displacement. UNICEF seeks to reach nearly 1.1 million children and their families, including children on the move and host communities, and those in other vulnerable communities affected by the impacts of COVID-19, natural hazards and other crises.

- 2021 was characterized by a dramatic increase of migration flows and the profile of migrants changed from solo male travelers to families with children and unaccompanied children. This truly is a children's crisis. UNICEF requests US$127.7 million to expand its support to provide humanitarian assistance to the most vulnerable children and support the governments to build shock-responsive systems to mitigate future vulnerabilities. Anticipated results include the continuity of life-saving interventions for the most vulnerable children and families, including health, nutrition, WASH, protection and education, and promoting social protection and cash-based programmes.

**KEY PLANNED TARGETS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Target Population</th>
<th>2021</th>
<th>2022</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Primary caregivers receiving infant and young child feeding counselling</td>
<td>553,259</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children and women accessing health care</td>
<td>284,850</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>People accessing a sufficient quantity of safe water</td>
<td>285,115</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Children/caregivers accessing mental health and psychosocial support</td>
<td>161,503</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**FUNDING REQUIREMENTS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Requirement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2021</td>
<td>US$ 127.7 million</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Target population decreased compared to 2021, mainly due to reduced figures for Mexico and Panama, as the 2022 HAC narrowed COVID-19 response only for populations in the context of migration. Figures are provisional and subject to change upon finalization of response planning documents.
HUMANITARIAN SITUATION AND NEEDS

Children in Mexico and Central America are facing multiple protracted crises due to climate shocks, complex political situations, intensified violence including violence against women and children, food insecurity, malnutrition, social and economic inequity and limited access to quality essential services, compounded by the health and socioeconomic impacts of COVID-19, fueled by migration and internal displacement. For example, intensifying violence has displaced more than 846,000 Mexicans and Central Americans within their countries. One in three internally displaced persons from countries in Central America are children. Without urgent interventions, the well-being and the future of millions of children are at risk. The year 2021 witnessed the dramatic increase of migration flows, which became mixed and multi-directional, partly due to increased forced/voluntary returns. The profile of migrants changed from young solo-male travelers to families with children as well as many unaccompanied children. Over 132,000 unaccompanied children were apprehended at the southwestern border of the United States between October 2020 and August 2021, representing a fourfold increase compared with the same period in 2020. For many unaccompanied adolescents, fleeing is often the only viable option to survive, as they fear for their life due to death threats and recruitment by gangs. Nearly 19,000 migrant children walked through the dangerous Darien jungle in Panama from South America. This is a children’s crisis.

Humanitarian needs of vulnerable children and families add pressure to existing services, often already scarce in remote communities, and overwhelm authorities in transit and destination countries, especially during peaks or mixed mass movements (“caravans”). Children and families have been hit hardest by the humanitarian and socioeconomic impacts of the pandemic, including extended school closures, disruption of essential services and intensifying violence against children and women. As of September 2021, countries included in this appeal recorded 1.1 million COVID-19 cases and 86,845 deaths. Only 35 per cent of the population in these countries is fully vaccinated against COVID-19, and the pandemic resulted in both temporarily slowing down cross-border movements and exacerbating the root causes for migration. With the emergence of new variants of the virus, expanding prevention, containment and effective treatment measures are critical to mitigate further negative secondary impact of the pandemic.

STORY FROM THE FIELD

In Casa Nuestras Raices, a shelter for unaccompanied migrant children run by Guatemalan authorities with UNICEF support, Luis Alvarado, the psychologist, uses magic as a playful tool to reduce the stress felt by children and adolescents in the shelter, making them discover hidden abilities through tricks. He teaches them that no matter how hard life has hit them, it is always a good time to do things differently – and that trusting in the values of effort and perseverance, like when you want to learn a magic trick, can always give you unexpected joys, because life is like magic.

Read more about this story here

Luis, a psychologist working at Casa Nuestras Raíces shelter for migrant children in Guatemala, uses magic to engage with some boys in the shelter.
HUMANITARIAN STRATEGY

With multiple protracted crises in the region, an increased number of families with children migrate and travel longer journeys in pursuit of a better and safer life. UNICEF’s Humanitarian Strategy comprises reinforced coordination among countries and focuses on providing humanitarian assistance and protection to the most vulnerable children, adolescents and women. As the increased flow of migrants overwhelms existing services, UNICEF invests in building local capacities and shock-responsive systems and ensures that cross-cutting issues (including protection from sexual exploitation and abuse, and accountability to affected populations) contribute to building the “triple nexus” (humanitarian-development-peace).

UNICEF plans to triple its investments in services delivery through multi-sectoral efforts to reach 738,000 people on the move, including 341,000 children (migrants, returnees, displaced) and host communities, by providing humanitarian assistance and support to build shock-responsive systems through key authorities and stakeholders. The deceleration of the COVID-19 pandemic will imply a gradual shift from urgent humanitarian relief to a longer-term approach, focused on local system strengthening.

Guided by the Core Commitments for Children in Humanitarian Action, UNICEF will ensure that 1.5 million vulnerable people, including 741,000 children, are protected from exposure to and the impacts of COVID-19 and other situations such as violence and the effects of climate shocks. Although on a smaller scale than 2021, UNICEF COVID-19 response - aligned with the global strategy - will focus on: support to public health responses for prevention; complement and strengthen the efforts of the governments and partners to maintain/restoreSCALE-up essential services in health, nutrition, WASH, child protection, gender-based violence, early childhood development, education and social protection; disseminate key information to reduce disease transmission and its impact; and make services equally accessible for people with disabilities and available in local languages.

UNICEF’s humanitarian response is led by Country Offices in affected countries, building local knowledge, existing partnerships, and extensive networks. They are closely supported by the Regional Office through technical assistance, quality assurance and oversight. UNICEF mobilizes its regional and global network to ensure that adequate staff capacity is made available, including as Global Cluster Lead Agency in WASH, nutrition, and co-lead for education, and the child protection Area of Responsibility. In El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras, UNICEF’s humanitarian action is also aligned with these countries’ inter-agency multi-crisis/multi-sectoral Humanitarian Response Plans (HRPs).

UNICEF’s evidence-based advocacy during emergencies is guided by needs-assessment, Humanitarian Performance Monitoring indicators, and evaluations. Grand Bargain commitments are mainstreamed, including for localization, strengthening government and local actors’ capacities, accountability to affected population mechanisms, and ensuring the quality of humanitarian cash transfers.

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2022 PROGRAMME TARGETS

### Nutrition
- 8,283 children aged 6 to 59 months with severe acute malnutrition admitted for treatment
- 319,852 children aged 6 to 59 months screened for wasting
- 553,259 primary caregivers of children aged 0 to 23 months receiving infant and young child feeding counselling
- 140,000 children aged 6 to 59 months receiving multiple micronutrient powders

### Health
- 284,850 children and women accessing primary health care in UNICEF-supported facilities
- 289 health care facility staff and community health workers trained in infection prevention and control
- 50,170 children receiving the minimum set of vaccines
- 2,850 health workers reached with PPE

### Water, sanitation and hygiene
- 285,115 people accessing a sufficient quantity of safe water for drinking and domestic needs
- 91,678 children use safe and appropriate WASH facilities and hygiene services in learning facilities and safe spaces
- 244,122 people reached with hand-washing behaviour-change programmes
- 427,973 people reached with critical WASH supplies

### Child protection, GBVIE and PSEA
- 161,503 children and parents/caregivers accessing mental health and psychosocial support
- 187,079 women, girls and boys accessing gender-based violence risk mitigation, prevention and/or response interventions
- 203,973 people who have access to a safe and accessible channel to report sexual exploitation and abuse by aid workers
- 9,420 unaccompanied and separated children accessing family-based care or a suitable alternative

### Education
- 121,687 children accessing formal or non-formal education, including early learning
- 26,800 children/adolescents accessing skills development programmes
- 670 schools implementing safe school protocols (infection prevention and control)
- 105,842 children receiving learning materials

### Social protection
- 43,890 households reached with cash transfers through an existing government system where UNICEF provided technical assistance and/or funding
- 2,467 households reached with UNICEF funded multi-purpose humanitarian cash transfers
- 13,000 households benefitting from new or additional social transfers from governments with UNICEF technical assistance support

### Cross-sectoral (HCT, C4D, RCCE and AAP)
- 3,267,750 people reached through messaging on prevention and access to services
- 147,200 people with access to established accountability mechanisms

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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. Programme targets are provisional and subject to change upon finalization of response planning documents.
UNICEF requests US$127.7 million to meet the humanitarian and resilience needs of children and families in Mexico and Central America, including migrants and host communities, and the most affected by COVID-19 and other crises. About 48 per cent of requested funds will support the scaling-up of the response for children/families on the move and host communities, (three times higher than 2021 budget); and 52 per cent will respond to humanitarian needs for vulnerable population groups related to COVID-19 and others crises.

Due to the increased scale and complexity of migration, and the multiple crises affecting the region, the funding needs have increased to allow opportune strategic shift of the humanitarian response, from technical assistance and system strengthening for COVID-19 response, to a stronger focus on direct service delivery and supply distribution in response to increased migration. The target population of migration-related response has more than doubled in most of the countries. The emphasis of its COVID-19 response on population on the move and host communities resulted in the reduction of overall targets compared to 2021, mainly in Mexico and Panama.

Funding requirements for El Salvador, Honduras and Guatemala will allow to implement comprehensive multi-sector Humanitarian Response Plans (HRPs).

UNICEF’s humanitarian strategy is strongly linked with its regular development programming, and UNICEF will address the urgent needs of the most vulnerable, while contributing to building more resilient and shock-responsive systems: US$36.4 million is critical to scale up protection services for the most vulnerable women and children; US$24.4 million to provide access to safe water and hygiene, and good hygiene practices; and US$21.5 million to allow children to safely access learning opportunities. Funding is also required at the regional level to ensure continuous evaluation, technical support to country offices and regional coordination responsibilities.

Without sufficient, timely flexible and multi-year investments in the region, UNICEF and its partners will be unable to prevent a worsening of the humanitarian situation that could reverse gains secured in the last decades.

**Sectors**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sectors</th>
<th>2022 total requirement (US$)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nutrition</td>
<td>19,514,948</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health</td>
<td>10,070,797</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Water, sanitation and hygiene</td>
<td>24,440,237</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child protection, GBVIE and PSEA</td>
<td>36,461,780</td>
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<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>21,503,535</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social protection</td>
<td>8,991,021</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cross-sectoral (HCT, C4D, RCCE and AAP)</td>
<td>3,546,087</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regional Support</td>
<td>3,200,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>127,728,405</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*This includes costs from other sectors/interventions: Social protection (7.0%), Cross-sectoral (HCT, C4D, RCCE and AAP) (2.8%), Regional Support (2.5%).
Who to contact for further information:

Jean Gough
Regional Director, Latin America and the Caribbean
+507 301-7474
jgough@unicef.org

Manuel Fontaine
Director, Office of Emergency Programmes (EMOPS)
+1 212 326 7163
mfontaine@unicef.org

June Kunugi
Director, Public Partnership Division (PPD)
+1 212 326 7118
jkunugi@unicef.org

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sectors</th>
<th>Belize</th>
<th>Costa Rica</th>
<th>El Salvador</th>
<th>Guatemala</th>
<th>Honduras</th>
<th>Mexico</th>
<th>Panama</th>
<th>Total</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nutrition</td>
<td>249,400</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>19,514,948</td>
<td>2,552,000</td>
<td>2,500,000</td>
<td>7,493,319</td>
<td>2,525,000</td>
<td>81,362,954</td>
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<tr>
<td>Health</td>
<td>194,605</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>249,400</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>4,114,254</td>
<td>528,505</td>
<td>5,997,700</td>
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<tr>
<td>Water, sanitation and hygiene</td>
<td>670,170</td>
<td>623,790</td>
<td>673,380</td>
<td>673,380</td>
<td>673,380</td>
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<td>Child protection, GBViE and PSEA</td>
<td>597,980</td>
<td>1,354,590</td>
<td>3,179,850</td>
<td>4,654,000</td>
<td>1,967,360</td>
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<td>12,644,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>Social protection</td>
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<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>4,767,600</td>
<td>1,160,000</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>8,991,021</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cross-sectoral (HCT, C4D, RCCE and AAP)</td>
<td>87,957</td>
<td>623,790</td>
<td>673,380</td>
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<tr>
<td>Regional Support</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3,200,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2022 Total</td>
<td>3,727,410</td>
<td>4,958,536</td>
<td>12,000,000</td>
<td>32,438,503</td>
<td>38,748,216</td>
<td>27,654,400</td>
<td>5,001,340</td>
<td>3,200,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Regional Support (US$)

| Total | 3,727,410 |

| Regional Support (US$) | 3,200,000 |

| Belize | 249,400 |
| Costa Rica | - |
| El Salvador | 19,514,948 |
| Guatemala | 2,552,000 |
| Honduras | 2,500,000 |
| Mexico | 7,493,319 |
| Panama | 2,525,000 |
| Total | 81,362,954 |

Sectors
The pandemic has impacted the economies of Mexico and Central America, causing a 8.5% reduction in GDP, above the regional -7.7% expected for LAC. ECLAC, Panorama Social de América Latina 2021.


UNICEF estimate based on PAHO data and UNICEF on number of children missing immunization in 2020, in 7 countries part of this appeal, according to estimated national immunization coverage.

Includes people in need of WASH support in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras, according to 2021 Humanitarian Needs Overview, in absence of inter-agency estimations for other countries part of the appeal.

Includes 1.4 million people in need of migrant children crossing the Darien jungle towards the US, October 2021.

The decrease of this target in 2022 compared to 2021, is mainly due to the reduction of target in El Salvador not prioritizing this action in 2022.

In Honduras.

As of May 2021.

30 per cent will address COVID-19-related humanitarian needs, and others for vulnerable population groups. The latter relates mainly to additional humanitarian needs identified in El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala, where the 2022 HAC prioritizes only COVID-19-related needs for populations in the context of migration, including host communities most impacted by migration flows.

Includes migration flows across Central America towards North America, forced and voluntary returns of migrants to countries of origin, extra-continental migration from Haiti, Cuba, and countries in Asia and Africa. The situation is further complicated considering the diversity of nationalities and origin of migrants, and the diversity of policies that can be applied for each case.

Poverty and lack of opportunities are root causes of migration worsened for Central America. For Covid-19 affected countries, after positive declines in poverty and extreme poverty rates from 2018 to 2019, especially in El Salvador and Honduras, ECLAC projected rates recorded in Northern Central America at the close of 2020 would exceed those of 2018. The pandemic has impacted the economies of Mexico and Central America, causing a 5.3% reduction in GDP, above the regional -7.7% expected for LAC. ECLAC, Panorama Social de América Latina 2021.


Includes migration flows across Central America this creates, since 2018, “migrant caravans” – group of thousands of migrants fleeing violence and poverty, often mobilized through social media.

COVID-19 response includes programmes such as nutrition programmes in schools, nutrition support for pregnant/feeding women, vitamin A supplementation for children 6-59 months, access to and/or processing of asylum claims, legal/judicial services for children in contact with the law.


The population targeted is higher than the total number of people/children to be reached because the target includes mass media outreach. 26

In Costa Rica and Honduras.

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