Increased and multidirectional migration flows across Mexico and Central America are compounding a humanitarian crisis for children on the move across the subregion. This is a protection crisis. Facing tightened border controls, more families and children travel irregular routes. The journeys can be extremely perilous - such as for those crossing through the Darién Gap - and entail a high risk of abuse, exploitation and family separation. This threatens children’s growth, and their development and well-being.

The situation of children on the move and vulnerable communities in the subregion is compounded by the residual consequences of the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, including deepened poverty; by the impact of the war in Ukraine on access to essential goods and services; and by people’s exposure to natural hazards and other effects of climate change. In 2023, 3.3 million children will need humanitarian assistance in Mexico and Central America.

UNICEF requires US$113.9 million to provide humanitarian assistance to 1.7 million people (including more than 800,000 children) along migratory paths and in vulnerable communities; and to support governments and partners in building better shock-responsive systems.

### KEY PLANNED TARGETS

- **185,685** children and women accessing primary healthcare
- **116,534** children receiving individual learning materials
- **111,776** women and children accessing gender-based violence mitigation, prevention, response
- **318,639** people accessing a sufficient quantity and quality of water

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

The increased flow of children on the move continues in Central America and Mexico. The movement has become multidirectional, with more families and children returning (both forced and voluntary) and traveling along irregular routes due to tightened border controls. This puts children at risk of abuse, exploitation and family separation. Children’s growth, development and well-being is under threat in what is truly a children’s crisis.

The recovery from the pandemic has been slow and unequal. Poverty remains high, and extreme poverty is expected to worsen in 2023. The situation is compounded by the global disruption of supply chains and inflation triggered by the war in Ukraine, and by the residual effects of natural hazards. These all challenge access to food, goods and essential services for the poorest, most shock-prone, migrant families and host communities. Some countries, for example Costa Rica and Mexico, have become hosts of migrants from other countries in the region, with influx of hundreds of thousands of migrants settling down each year, adding pressure on the existing services.

More than 120,000 unaccompanied children were apprehended at the southwestern border of the United States between October 2021 and July 2022 - a more than 13 per cent increase from the same period last year. And 2022 trends show an increase in the number of asylum applications, which has an impact in and beyond the region.

Violence is one of the main drivers of migration in the region. For many unaccompanied adolescents, staying home means limited future prospects and the risk of gang recruitments and death. Violence is also a main risk of migration. For example, the Darien Gap is controlled by armed groups. Migrants taking this migration route are exposed to robbery, physical and sexual assault and rape. Multiple protracted and compounding crises - due to climate hazards, sociopolitical turmoil, inequity, food insecurity, malnutrition and limited access to quality essential services - continue to fuel migration and internal displacement in the region.

The humanitarian needs of vulnerable children and families add pressure to existing services, often already scarce in remote communities, and overwhelm local authorities in transit and destination countries, especially during peaks or mixed mass movements (‘caravans’). Violence, structural inequity and natural disasters uproot children and families within their own countries, and internal displacement is often considered a first step toward migration. In 2022, there are 900,000 internally displaced people in Mexico, Honduras and Guatemala alone.

STORY FROM THE FIELD

Milton and his family left Nicaragua, looking for better opportunities. "My family was at risk. I did not see any future, neither for my children nor me," Milton says.

During their transit, they stayed in a shelter supported by UNICEF in Tapachula, Mexico, in the country's south near the Guatemalan border. There they have benefited from the improvements in the water and sanitation system. "Now, we have dignified restrooms and water access," Milton says.

The migration of families is an extremely complex phenomenon that has been increasing in the last decade. Mexico’s southern border is an area of high migratory activity, with thousands of people entering the country every month.

Read more about this story here
HUMANITARIAN STRATEGY

With multiple protracted crises in the region, an increasing number of children are migrating and travelling longer journeys in pursuit of a better and safer life. UNICEF’s humanitarian strategy for the 2023 appeal will focus up to 80 per cent of activities on responding to their more acute needs. As the increased flow of migrants overwhelms services, with partners and governments, and guided by the Core Commitments for Children in Humanitarian Action, UNICEF will invest in addressing these acute humanitarian needs - such as access to safe water and sanitation facilities and psychosocial support for children at transit reception centres. UNICEF will also be a partner in building shock-responsive systems, for instance by supporting the creation and roll-out of alternative care or case management models and response protocols, reinforcing referral mechanisms and information systems on child protection issues or by strengthening social protection systems’ capacities to adapt in times of crises.

UNICEF ensures that the most vulnerable migrant children and families receive humanitarian support at both sides of borders by deploying capacities to monitor the situation of children in hotspots. An important component of this is mobile units that provide information, protection, water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH), health and nutrition services. UNICEF also works to strengthen the capacities of border authorities and partners and supports governments’ binational coordination mechanisms, information sharing and protocols.

UNICEF ensures the systematic inclusion of cross-cutting issues, such as protection from sexual exploitation and abuse and accountability to affected populations, as well as a focus on building the humanitarian-development-peace nexus. UNICEF’s evidence-based advocacy and humanitarian action is built on investment in information management and knowledge exchange, needs-assessment, close monitoring of humanitarian performance and evaluations. Grand Bargain commitments are mainstreamed across UNICEF strategies: localization; strengthening government and local actors’ capacities; accountability to affected populations; and ensuring the quality and impact of humanitarian cash transfers.

UNICEF mobilizes its regional and global network to ensure that adequate staff capacity is made available, including as global cluster lead agency for the WASH and Nutrition Clusters, and co-lead for the Education Cluster and the regional cash working group, and the Child Protection Area of Responsibility. In El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras, UNICEF’s humanitarian action is aligned with inter-agency Humanitarian Response Plans.

UNICEF will continue its collaboration and coordination with other United Nations agencies, particularly with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the International Organization for Migration, through joint or complementary advocacy and response efforts addressing the needs of children and families on the move. Joint efforts will also support humanitarian coordination and systems strengthening - at national, subnational and sectoral levels.

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

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 subject to finalization of response planning documents during the first quarter of 2023, including the Inter-agency Humanitarian Needs Overview and Humanitarian Response Plan for El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras.

2023 PROGRAMME TARGETS

Health

- 7,887 children receiving the minimum set of vaccines
- 185,685 children and women accessing primary healthcare in UNICEF-supported facilities

Nutrition

- 216,897 children 6-59 months screened for wasting
- 445,786 primary caregivers of children 0-23 months receiving infant and young child feeding counselling
- 1,750 children 6-59 months receiving micronutrient powder

Child protection, GBViE and PSEA

- 139,630 children, adolescents and caregivers accessing community-based mental health and psychosocial support
- 111,776 women, girls and boys accessing gender-based violence risk mitigation, prevention and/or response interventions
- 96,600 people with safe and accessible channels to report sexual exploitation and abuse by personnel who provide assistance to affected populations
- 10,280 unaccompanied and separated children provided with alternative care and/or reunified

Education

- 70,093 children accessing formal or non-formal education, including early learning
- 116,534 children receiving individual learning materials
- 3,740 children and adolescents accessing skills development programmes

Water, sanitation and hygiene

- 318,639 people accessing a sufficient quantity and quality of water for drinking and domestic needs
- 26,856 children using safe and appropriate WASH facilities and hygiene services in learning facilities and safe spaces
- 259,110 people reached with hand-washing behaviour-change programmes
- 330,089 people reached with critical WASH supplies

Social protection

- 18,890 households benefitting from new or additional social assistance (cash/in kind) measures from governments with UNICEF-technical assistance support
- 8,128 households reached with UNICEF-funded multi-purpose humanitarian cash transfers

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

- 2,113,450 people reached through messaging on prevention and access to services
- 170,520 people with access to established accountability mechanisms and interagency reporting platforms

Programme targets are subject to finalization of response planning documents during the first quarter of 2023, including the Inter-agency Humanitarian Needs Overview and Humanitarian Response Plan for El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras.
UNICEF requests US$113.9 million to meet the increasingly complex humanitarian needs of children on the move and their families, along their migration journey, in all countries in Central America and Mexico: Panama, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Honduras, El Salvador, Guatemala, Belize and Mexico. In addition, in alignment with inter-agency appeals, UNICEF will work in support of other vulnerable populations in El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras to meet needs related to climate change, food insecurity and violence.

UNICEF’s humanitarian strategy and regular development programming are linked. UNICEF will address the urgent needs of the most vulnerable and also contribute to building more resilient and shock-responsive systems. To do this, US$40.5 million is critical to scale up child protection services; US$17.8 million to provide access to safe water and safe hygiene practices; and US$18.7 million to strengthen continued access to education for children on the move. Funding at the regional level will ensure continuous technical support to country offices for quality programming.

Without sufficient, timely, flexible and multi-year funds, UNICEF and its partners will be unable to respond to immediate humanitarian needs or build systems that provide sustainable medium-and long-term solutions to address worsening humanitarian situations. This could potentially reverse developmental gains made during the last decades.

The context of the 2023 appeal is one of overall increased needs that call for a scale-up of the UNICEF response. However, the funding requirement for 2023 has decreased by 11 per cent compared with 2022, reflecting the exclusion of COVID-19 pandemic-related needs and response from the current appeal. Of note is that Nicaragua is now included in the appeal.
### Who to contact for further information:

- **Youssouf Abdel-Jelil**  
  Regional Director, Latin America and the Caribbean (a.i.)  
  +507 64494437  
  yabdeljelil@unicef.org

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

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

### Sectors

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<th>Child protection, GBViE and PSEA</th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Water, sanitation and hygiene</th>
<th>Social protection</th>
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### 2023 Total Requirement (US$)

- Health: 992,300
- Nutrition: 22,789
- Child protection, GBViE and PSEA: 700
- Education: 3,074,722
- Water, sanitation and hygiene: 3,898,644
- Social protection: 9,603,936
- Cross-sectoral (HCT, SBC, RCCE and AAP): -
1. This appeal covers Belice, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua. Nicaragua has been added to this appeal due to its geographical location on the routes of migrants. It covers the humanitarian needs of populations on the move in these countries. Other humanitarian needs in El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras are pending, as comprehensive multisectoral, inter-agency Humanitarian Response Plans (HRPs) will be developed for these countries.

2. COVID-19 remains a Public Health Emergency of International Concern as declared by the World Health Organization in January 2020. On 1 July 2022, UNICEF deactivated its Level 3 Stabilized Phase for the global COVID-19 pandemic response. All activities related to COVID-19 pandemic response, including programme targets and funding requirements, have been shifted into regular development programming and operations. While UNICEF’s Level 3 emergency response phase of the COVID-19 pandemic response is coming to an end, the humanitarian organization is continuing to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on children, their families and their communities and on the social systems they rely on.

3. Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), Repercussions in Latin America and the Caribbean of the War in Ukraine: How should the region face this new crisis?, United Nations, 6 June 2022, available at <https://hdl.handle.net/11362/47913>.

4. This estimate is based on inter-agency planning figures (from 2021-2022 HRP) for El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras; the 2022 Regional Refugee and Migrant Response Plan (RRMP) and preliminary figures for 2023; and estimates made by UNICEF for other countries that are part of this inter-agency planning process.

5. Figures for people in need were derived from the following sources: El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico; 2021-2022 HRP; Costa Rica, Mexico and Panama, based on the 2022 RRMP; and for Belice and Nicaragua, figures were derived from information on the impact the hurricanes Eta and Iota in November 2020.

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.

7. In 2022, UNICEF focused on providing technical assistance to government programmes in Guatemala and Honduras as well as in direct implementation to complement government assistance, particularly focusing on migrant and refugee children and families. To ensure stronger support to key authorities and stakeholders, UNICEF will increase its focus on child protection actions, and the funding requirement in this area has increased accordingly.

8. Sectoral needs are mainly extracted from 2021/2022 inter-agency planning figures, which may be underestimated because these included COVID-19-related needs.

9. The figures for people in need in the health sector were derived from the following sources: El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras used the 2021-2022 HRP; Costa Rica, Mexico and Panama used the 2022 RRMP; and Belice and Nicaragua figures were derived from information on the impact the hurricanes Eta and Iota in November 2020.


11. In 2020, 16.6 per cent of people aged 5 years age in Mexico suffered from starting, compared with 11.8 per cent in the Caribbean and 8.6 per cent in South America. Between 2019 and 2020, the prevalence of undernourishment in Mesoamerica increased by 2.5 percentage points, from 8.1 per cent to 10.6 per cent (from 14.4 to 19 million people), reaching its highest level in the last 20 years. FAO, IFAD, PNHU, UNICEF and WFP, Latin America and the Caribbean: Regional overview of food security and nutrition 2021 - Statistics and trends, FAO, Santiago, 2021, available at <https://doi.org/10.4060/cb7497en>.


17. Mesoamerica, moderate or severe food insecurity had not shown significant variation until 2019. However, after a year of the COVID-19 pandemic, the prevalence rose by 9.3 percentage points in 2020 (from 28.2 per cent to 37.5 per cent). Source: Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), World Food Programme (WFP) and UNICEF, Latin America and the Caribbean: Regional overview of food security and nutrition 2021 - Statistics and trends, FAO, Santiago, 2021, available at <https://doi.org/10.4060/vb747/en>.


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22. In such key sectors as health, education, child protection, social protection and monitoring and planning, UNICEF promotes, through regular programming, continuous efforts to strengthen national and local systems by including/networking mechanisms to build resilience to various shocks and to be prepared for rapid-onset crises.

23. Endnotes

24. Considering also cross-sectoral commitments (gender, disabilities, early childhood development, adolescent participation, etc), as well as climate change and resilience.

25. UNICEF is committed to empowering local responders in humanitarian crises in a variety of ways. The revised Core Commitments made in 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.

26. The Grand Bargain is a unique agreement between some of the largest donors and humanitarian organizations, which have committed to getting more means into the hands of people in need and improving the effectiveness and efficiency of humanitarian action.


28. To ensure stronger support to key authorities and stakeholders, UNICEF will increase its focus on child protection actions, and the funding requirement in this area has increased accordingly.

29. UNICEF will increase its focus on providing learning opportunities for children on the move and host communities. This direct support can be more costly than virtual/assistance education interventions, one reason for lower targets compared with previous years.

30. In 2022, UNICEF focused on providing technical assistance to government programmes in Guatemala and Honduras as well as in direct implementation to complement government assistance, particularly focusing on migrant and refugee children and families. The 2023 targets considers a blended approach that comprises technical assistance to authorities and a higher portion of direct budget funding support to government-led and UNICEF-funded programmes.

31. The population targeted is higher than the total number of people/children to be reached because the target includes mass media outreach. A border closure would affect the migration flow in neighbouring countries, which would experience denser population concentrations and/or longer stationary periods.

32. Migrant flows can experience abrupt variations and peaks, driven by factors including changes in national/regional regulatory frameworks. Changes in work visa requirements can cause change for a group of migrants (previously in a regular migration situation), who will then start to move in search of new locations for their subsistence.

33. Changes in work visa requirements can cause change for a group of migrants (previously in a regular migration situation), who will then start to move in search of new locations for their subsistence. A border closure would affect the migration flow in neighbouring countries, which would experience denser population concentrations and/or longer stationary periods.

34. Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), Repercussions in Latin America and the Caribbean of the War in Ukraine: How should the region face this new crisis?, United Nations, 6 June 2022, available at <https://hdl.handle.net/11362/47913>.