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

HIGHLIGHTS

1. 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 Darien Gap – and entail a high risk of abuse, exploitation, and family separation. This threatens children’s growth, and their development and well-being.

2. The situation of children on the move and vulnerable communities in the subregion is exacerbated by the growing exposure to natural hazards and other effects of climate change, resulting in eroded livelihoods and income sources, malnutrition, and food insecurity. UNICEF estimates that 4 million children will need humanitarian assistance in Mexico and Central America in 2023.

3. UNICEF requires US$142.3 million to provide humanitarian assistance to 2 million people (including 733,000 children) along migratory paths and in vulnerable communities and to support governments and partners in building better shock-responsive systems.

KEY PLANNED TARGETS

- **112,184** children and women accessing primary healthcare
- **130,670** children accessing formal or non-formal education, including early learning
- **264,162** women and children accessing gender-based violence mitigation, prevention, response
- **653,999** people accessing a sufficient quantity and quality of water

**FUNDING REQUIREMENTS**

US$ **142.3 million**

**IN NEED**

- 10.8 million people
- 4 million children

**TO BE REACHED**

- 2 million people
- 730,288 children

Figures are provisional and subject to change upon finalization of the inter-agency needs and 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 are 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 the residual effects of natural hazards. This all challenges access to food, goods, and essential services for the poorest, most shock-prone, migrant families and host communities. In some countries, such as Costa Rica and Mexico, thousands of migrants are settling down each year, adding pressure on the existing services.

Between October 2021 and September 2022, more than 152,000 encounters with unaccompanied children were recorded by authorities at the southwestern border of the United States – a 3 per cent increase from the same period last year. Over the first months of 2023, 1 in 5 migrants walking through the Darien jungle were children, being the fastest growing group among people fleeing their homes under the threat of violence or migrating in search of better opportunities.

Violence is one of the main drivers of migration in the region. For many children and adolescents, staying home means limited future prospects and the risk of gang recruitment and death. 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 or non-existing in remote communities or transit hotspots, and overwhelm local authorities in transit and destination countries, especially during peaks or mixed mass movements. Violence, structural inequity, and disasters uproot children and families within their own countries, and internal displacement is often considered a first step toward migration. In 2022, there were over 900,000 internally displaced people in Mexico, Honduras, and Guatemala alone.

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STORY FROM THE FIELD

At the Assistance Center for Migrants and Refugees (CAPMiR), located at the Guatemala-Honduras border, UNICEF and partners assist migrant children and their families. Migrants receive information about safe routes, their rights, access to available protection services, and health care. They can take a shower, wash their clothes, access the internet, re-establish communication with their relatives, and charge their cell phones. Migrants arriving at this border have survived the Darien jungle, a traumatic experience for children. They walked for eight days in a row, between 10 and 12 hours each day.

Read more about this story here

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SECTOR NEEDS

- **2.4 million** people in need of health assistance
- **2.8 million** people in need of nutrition assistance
- **1.5 million** children in need of protection services
- **1.4 million** children in need of education support
- **3.5 million** people in need of WASH support

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With multiple protracted crises in the region, an increasing number of children are migrating and traveling longer journeys in pursuit of a better and safer life. As the increased flow of migrants overcomes services, together 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 WASH facilities, life-saving supplies, and psychosocial support for children at transit hotspots and reception centres. UNICEF will be a partner in building shock-responsive systems by supporting the creation and roll-out of transitory care or case management models and response protocols, reinforcing referral mechanisms and information systems on child protection issues, enhancing protocols for continuity of education, supporting more resilient WASH facilities in affected areas, and strengthening social protection systems’ capacities to adapt in times of crises – including cash programmes.

UNICEF ensures that the most vulnerable migrant children and families receive humanitarian support along their journey by deploying capacities to monitor the situation of children in hotspots. An important component of this are mobile units that provide information, protection, 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 supports 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 are built on investment in information management and knowledge exchange, needs assessments, 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 networks to ensure that adequate staff capacity is made available, including as the global lead agency for the WASH and Nutrition Clusters and co-lead for the Education sector and the regional Cash Working Group, and the Child Protection Area of Responsibility.

Across programmes, UNICEF ensures accountability for affected population mechanisms and the participation of targeted groups in the design of interventions.

UNICEF will continue its collaboration and coordination with other United Nations agencies, particularly with the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, Office of the 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 in the subregion.

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.
UNICEF increased its 2023 appeal to US$142.3 million, in order to meet the increasingly complex humanitarian needs of children and families in Central America and Mexico. Across all countries, UNICEF will respond to the urgent needs of children on the move regardless of whether they are displaced, in transit or settled in a host country. In addition, UNICEF will support other vulnerable populations in Belize, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua to meet needs related to climate change, food insecurity, and violence, exacerbated by poverty, exclusion, and chronic vulnerabilities. Across programmes, UNICEF will invest in nexus strategies that safeguard the rights and well-being of children, addressing immediate needs while contributing to building more resilient systems. Funding at the regional level will ensure continuous technical support to country offices for quality programming. Currently, the funding gaps to carry out life-saving interventions in WASH, education, social protection, health, and nutrition are over 90 per cent. Without sufficient, timely, flexible, and multi-year funds, UNICEF and partners will be unable to maintain access to basic services, such as safe water and child protection services for migrants in borders and hotspots, or maintain the operation of WASH infrastructures in host and other vulnerable communities, including those suffering the effects of extreme weather. Funding is needed to sustain mobile health and nutrition services across migration routes, and for nutrition screening and treatment services to reach hard-to-access vulnerable communities where families lack access to nutritious food and livelihoods. Flexible funding will help UNICEF’s ongoing efforts towards more shock-responsive social protection systems – including cash programmes, that can scale up rapidly to reach the most vulnerable families. UNICEF urges donors to urgently scale up efforts to support this response to assist children at risk due to poverty, situations of violence, unsafe migration routes, and exposure to natural hazards.

*This includes costs from other sectors/interventions : Social protection (5.8%), Cross-sectoral (HCT, SBC, RCCE and AAP) (2.6%), Regional Support (2.5%).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Appeal sector</th>
<th>Original 2023 HAC requirement (US$)</th>
<th>Revised 2023 HAC requirement (US$)</th>
<th>Funds available (US$)</th>
<th>Funding gap (US$)</th>
<th>Funding gap (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Health</td>
<td>7,759,700</td>
<td>11,062,687</td>
<td>614,678</td>
<td>10,448,009</td>
<td>94.4%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nutrition</td>
<td>15,179,131</td>
<td>27,411,022</td>
<td>1,850,568</td>
<td>25,560,454</td>
<td>93.2%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Child protection</td>
<td>40,463,358</td>
<td>37,896,840</td>
<td>4,111,025</td>
<td>33,785,815</td>
<td>89.2%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>18,702,008</td>
<td>15,615,650</td>
<td>3,379,426</td>
<td>12,236,224</td>
<td>78.4%</td>
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<tr>
<td>WASH</td>
<td>17,781,063</td>
<td>34,884,872</td>
<td>256,364</td>
<td>34,628,508</td>
<td>99.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social protection</td>
<td>7,260,396</td>
<td>8,227,880</td>
<td>297,657</td>
<td>7,930,223</td>
<td>96.4%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cross-sectoral</td>
<td>3,268,941</td>
<td>3,700,959</td>
<td>207,386</td>
<td>3,493,573</td>
<td>94.4%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Regional Support</td>
<td>3,520,000</td>
<td>3,520,000</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2,502,163</td>
<td>71.1%</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>113,934,597</strong></td>
<td><strong>142,319,910</strong></td>
<td><strong>11,734,941</strong></td>
<td><strong>130,584,969</strong></td>
<td><strong>91.8%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Who to contact for further information:

Garry Conille
Regional Director, Latin America and the Caribbean
T +507 3017400
gconille@unicef.org

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

June Kunugi
Director, Public Partnerships Division (PPD)
T +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>Nicaragua</th>
<th>Panama</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Health</td>
<td>-</td>
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<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nutrition</td>
<td>1,376,000</td>
<td>33,640</td>
<td>33,640</td>
<td>860,000</td>
<td>33,640</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>696,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>1,183,115</td>
<td>498,200</td>
<td>498,200</td>
<td>1,873,115</td>
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<tr>
<td>Child Protection, GBV, PE and PSEA</td>
<td>431,615</td>
<td>598,115</td>
<td>598,115</td>
<td>431,615</td>
<td>598,115</td>
<td>-</td>
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<tr>
<td>Social Protection</td>
<td>2,270,120</td>
<td>2,330,000</td>
<td>2,330,000</td>
<td>2,270,120</td>
<td>2,330,000</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Water, Sanitation and Hygiene</td>
<td>3,45,100</td>
<td>345,100</td>
<td>345,100</td>
<td>3,45,100</td>
<td>345,100</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regional Support</td>
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<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>4,970,310</td>
<td>3,898,644</td>
<td>12,794,795</td>
<td>33,984,131</td>
<td>44,489,412</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Regional Support (US$)           | 3,520,000 | 4,234,000 | 1,263,000  | 1,236,000  | 2,201,000  | -      | -         | -      |
| Total                            | 4,234,000 | 4,970,310 | 12,794,795 | 33,984,131 | 44,489,412 | -      | -         | -      |

| Sectors                          | 3.520,000 | 3,395,000 | 1,453,000  | 1,953,000  | 2,291,000  | -      | -         | -      |
| Water, Sanitation and Hygiene    | 3,395,000 | 3,395,000 | 1,953,000  | 1,953,000  | 2,291,000  | -      | -         | -      |
| Total                            | 3,395,000 | 3,395,000 | 1,953,000  | 1,953,000  | 2,291,000  | -      | -         | -      |

| Sectors                          | 3.520,000 | 3,395,000 | 1,453,000  | 1,953,000  | 2,291,000  | -      | -         | -      |
| Water, Sanitation and Hygiene    | 3,395,000 | 3,395,000 | 1,953,000  | 1,953,000  | 2,291,000  | -      | -         | -      |
| Total                            | 3,395,000 | 3,395,000 | 1,953,000  | 1,953,000  | 2,291,000  | -      | -         | -      |
The cost of actions impacting multiple subregions has been proportionally distributed across all multi-country appeals for the region. Generation, capacity building and support for scaling up responses to the sudden deterioration of humanitarian situations at the country level. 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. UNICEF’s humanitarian appeal is aligned with inter-agency plans active in countries in the subregion, including 2023 Humanitarian Response Plans (HRPs) for El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras, and the Costa Rica and Panama chapters of the 2023-2024 Regional Refugee and Migrant Response Plan for Refugees and Migrants from Venezuela (RMRP).

3. 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.

4. The calculation of the total people in need of humanitarian assistance was derived from the following sources: El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras 2023 Humanitarian Response Plans (HRPs); Belize, Costa Rica, Mexico, Nicaragua, and Panama, estimated by UNICEF based on projections of population move according to official figures, and estimations of populations affected by the residual effects of disasters.

5. Ibid.

6. To minimize double counting, the total 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 660,000 women, 381,000 girls, and 280,000 people with disabilities. UNICEF aims to cover around 20 per cent of the total people in need, assuming that, as per interagency plans, other partners are covering the remaining caseload. It is worth noting that in the Humanitarian Response Plans (HRPs) 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 (34 per cent of the HRP funding ask in El Salvador, 26 per cent in Guatemala, and 47 per cent in Honduras).

7. To minimize double counting, the total 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 figure includes 381,000 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.


12. Including through strategies for migrant children in transit (i.e., mobile services).

13. 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 their 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.

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

15. Sectoral amounts include other costs related to advocacy, communication, coordination, planning, monitoring, evaluation, reporting, operations and security.

16. Regional Office requirements will 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.

ENDNOTES

1. 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 Sustained 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 was deactivated, the 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.

2. 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. Other crises covered by this appeal include 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. UNICEF's humanitarian appeal is aligned with inter-agency plans active in countries in the subregion, including 2023 Humanitarian Response Plans (HRPs) for El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras, and the Costa Rica and Panama chapters of the 2023-2024 Regional Refugee and Migrant Response Plan for Refugees and Migrants from Venezuela (RMRP).

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