



Sri Lanka

Economic Crisis 2023

Situation Report No. 2



Reporting Period: 1 January to 31 December 2023

Highlights

- 2023 showed some stabilization of Sri Lanka's economy with the IMF debt restructuring agreement on 20 March 2023. However, many vulnerable families faced food insecurity and nutrition challenges, loss of livelihoods, and rising protection concerns as they continue to depend on negative coping mechanisms.
- The FAO/WFP Crop and Food Security Assessment Mission in May 2023 revealed that 3.9 million people were moderately food insecure with over 10,000 households facing severe food insecurity¹. Over 2.9 million children need humanitarian assistance to access lifesaving nutrition, health, education, water & sanitation, protection, and social protection services.
- UNICEF reached over 1.8 million people, including 1.4 children with humanitarian assistance during 2023 including, 508,872 children 6-59 months with multiple micronutrient powders, 952,551 adolescents with mental health and psychosocial support through trained teachers in schools, 120,000 people with access to safe drinking water, 100,747 children with learning recovery programmes and educational materials, and 49,446 pre-school children with mid-day meals. UNICEF's humanitarian cash transfers reached 113,481 households ensuring nutrition food access to mothers with young children in the most vulnerable districts.

Situation in Numbers

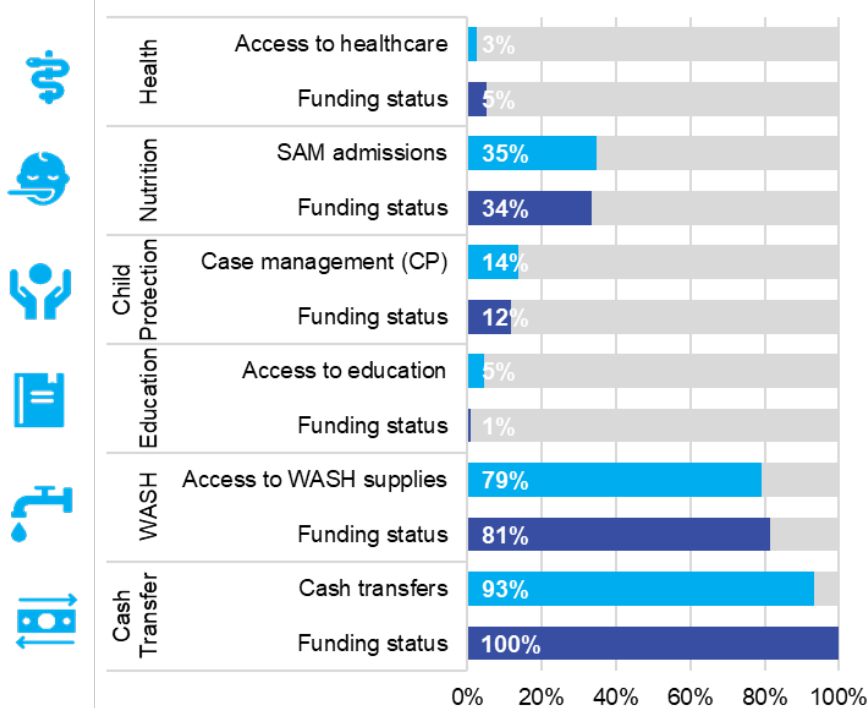
2.9 million
children needed humanitarian assistance

6.2 million
people in need (HNP, November 2022)

2.8 million
Children and women needed nutrition services

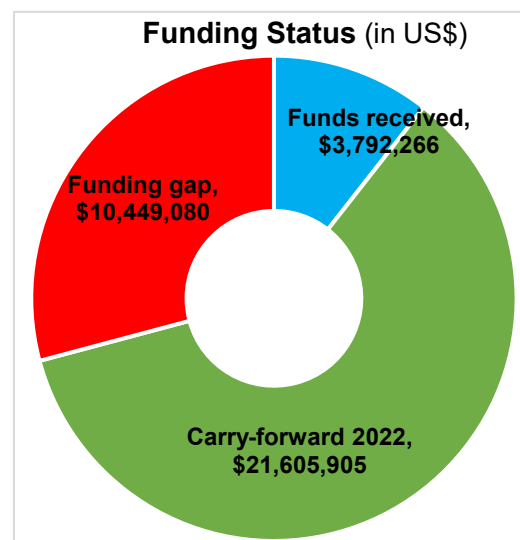
1.1 million
Children needed education support

UNICEF's Response and Funding Status²



UNICEF Appeal 2023

US\$ 28 million



¹ Special Report: FAO/WFP Crop and Food Security Assessment Mission (CFSAM) to the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka (25 May 2023)

² Funding status depicts funds received and allocated per activity, not the overall sector funding

Funding Overview and Partnerships

In June 2022, UNICEF appealed for US\$25 million to provide timely life-saving services for women and children affected by the economic crisis in Sri Lanka. Following this, in December 2022, a second Humanitarian Action for Children (HAC) was launched by UNICEF to cover the requirements for 2023. UNICEF expresses its sincere gratitude to donors for the US\$3.7 million received in 2023, including from the Government of France, Japan, and the Global Humanitarian Thematic Funds, and US\$21.6 million carried forward from 2022, which were utilized for humanitarian responses from January 2023 onwards.

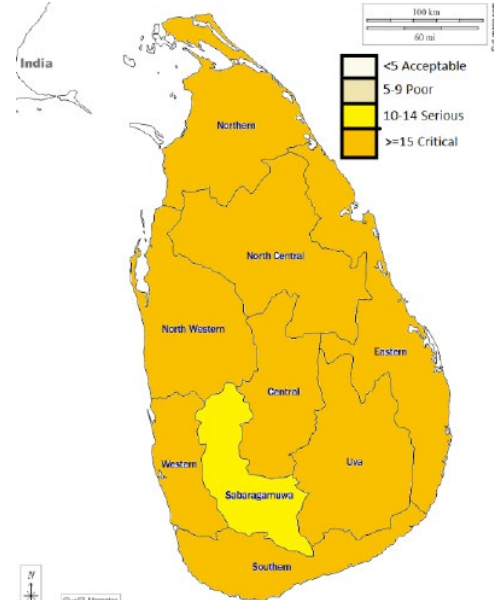
Situation Overview & Humanitarian Needs

Sri Lanka's economy showed signs of stabilization in 2023 after experiencing the worst economic crisis in 2022. After Sri Lanka secured adequate debt relief assurances from the official creditors on 20 March 2023, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) Board approved US\$2.9 billion for 48 months under the Extended Fund Facility programme. The bailout opened up additional funding from the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank for social protection, financial sector development and infrastructure development. Headline inflation¹ substantially declined by August 2023 to 4 per cent, which helped limit the further increase in food insecurity and malnutrition among poor households².

The FAO/WFP Crop and Food Security Assessment Mission (CFSAM) to Sri Lanka in May 2023 reported that 3.9 million people were moderately acutely food insecure while over 10,000 households were severely acutely food insecure.³ Estate sector communities were found to be suffering from the highest level of acute food insecurity followed by households highly dependent on social protection schemes such as Samurdhi or disability benefits.⁴ Despite the apparent economic stability and improved food security in the country, a significantly high percentage of households (62 per cent) were adopting livelihood-based coping strategies (i.e. withdrawing savings, borrowing money, purchasing food on credit) to access food, compared to 48 per cent in May 2022. The report highlighted that 26 per cent of households were employing emergency or crisis-level livelihood coping strategies, which included "selling productive assets (e.g., farming equipment), reducing essential health/education expenses, withdrawing children completely from school, and selling land".⁵

With the strengthening of El Niño Southern Oscillation (ENSO), Sri Lanka experienced delayed Southwest monsoon and less rainfall affecting 139,149 people in seven districts with drought and water scarcity. The Government of Sri Lanka distributed drinking water through bowsers to 57,718 people (21,122 families) in the severely affected districts. Drought conditions negatively affected the irrigated agriculture season in the middle of the year⁶, destroying over 45,000 acres of paddy fields in severely affected districts⁷. The drought situation and intermittent rainfall caused an increase in the number of reported cases of dengue throughout Sri Lanka with at least 89,799 people contracting dengue fever during the year (17.4 per cent increase compared to 2022)⁸. The Western province reported the highest number of dengue cases (28.8 per cent of the total).

Sri Lanka: Prevalence of wasting in children 6-59 months in Sri Lanka



Source: 2022 National Nutrition and Micronutrient Survey

¹ Headline inflation is measured by the year-on-year change in the Consumer Price Index, which calculates the cost to purchase a fixed basket of goods to determine how much inflation is occurring in the country's economy.

² Sri Lanka Development Update 2023 (October 2023), <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/srilanka/publication/sri-lanka-development-update-2023>

³ FAO. 2023. Special Report – FAO/WFP Crop and Food Security Assessment Mission (CFSAM) to the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka. CFSAMs Special Reports. 25 May 2023. Rome. <https://doi.org/10.4060/cc6202en>

⁴ *ibid.* p.1

⁵ *ibid.* p.53

⁶ Rice is the staple food in Sri Lanka and is cultivated twice year with rainwater during Northeast monsoon (Maha season) and using irrigated water during May to end of August (Yala season).

⁷ Yala paddy harvest could be affected by drought, 18 July 2023, Daily News, Retrieved from: <https://www.dailynews.lk/2023/07/18/local/34911/yala-paddy-harvest-could-be-affected-by-drought/>

⁸ Dengue update, Week 52 by the National Dengue Control Unit, Ministry of Health

The National Nutrition and Micronutrient Survey 2022 indicated the prevalence of wasting among children 6 -59 months of age is increasing, which was reported to be at 19.8 per cent in 2022, compared to 2021 when the prevalence was 13.2 per cent⁹. The prevalence of severe wasting also increased from 1.7 per cent¹⁰ to 2.5 per cent¹¹. Similar worsening of indicators was noted for all undernutrition indicators and across various age groups. For instance, the prevalence of stunting in children 6-59 months increased from 12.7 per cent to 13.7 per cent. Similarly, in children 5-9 years, the prevalence of thinness increased from 20.9 per cent to 25.8 per cent. A high prevalence of Vitamin D deficiency and emerging micronutrient deficiencies, particularly among children between 5-9 and 10-17 years of age, such as vitamin B12 and Zinc were the other nutritional concerns the country faced in 2023. The data from the Nutrition Month assessment undertaken by the Family Health Bureau of the Ministry of Health also confirmed the trend of the worsening malnutrition status of young children. The levels of stunting and underweight in children under five has also worsened between 2022 and 2023 (stunting from 9.2 per cent to 10.3 per cent and underweight from 15.3 per cent to 17.1 per cent¹²). In October 2023, the percentage of children under five years who were underweight was 17.2 per cent, compared to 15.2 per cent in October 2022¹³.

A year into the economic crisis, which began in May 2022, more families have resorted to negative coping mechanisms to prioritize food consumption over expenses for education, health, and protection. Parents faced many challenges in prioritizing income at the household level for education. As a result, partner reports indicated increasing irregular school attendance among children, which could lead to school-drop out eventually, along with increasing mental health issues related to education. The education sector focused on long-term guidance in line with the humanitarian-development nexus, prioritizing remedial programmes and learning recovery to address the long-term learning crisis in line with the ongoing Education Reforms. A study by the Ministry of Education (MoE) revealed that in 2021 and 2022, only 14 per cent and 15 per cent of Grade 3 students achieved minimum essential learning competency in literacy and numeracy respectively, and the pre-existent disparities in learning outcomes are widening due to the adverse impact of the last 3-years of serious disruptions of children's learning. The data showed that all the positive gains in education achieved pre-COVID-19 time, including access, and learning outcomes, had been reversed. MoE, with UNICEF's support, commenced to address this learning crisis particularly focusing on foundational learning at primary and preschool levels as a top priority and calling on extended support from the UN and other partners. However, funding for the education sector was limited in both 2022 and 2023, preventing a full humanitarian response.

In addition, anecdotal reports indicate an increasing trend in domestic violence, mental health issues bordering suicides, child abuse, and child labour. However, given the weak capacity of the routine data collection systems, such anecdotal evidence could not be verified. The government probation and childcare services still report an increase in requests to admit children to institutional care. The protection sector focused on addressing these systemic issues and strengthening the government capacity to provide child protection services both in humanitarian and development phases.

Summary Analysis of Programme Response

The UNICEF Sri Lanka HAC was launched on 5 December 2022 and the programme response interventions detailed below reflect results achieved by the end of 2023.

Health

Sri Lanka has a strong health system and health services are provided through a wide network of hospitals and field health clinics for the whole population including mothers and children. The facilities including medicines are provided at hospitals that are funded through government funding sources. During the economic crisis, production and procurement of medicines through the routine government system (i.e., either production at the State Pharmaceutical Corporation or procurement by the Medical Supply Division) was seriously impeded and some essential medicines ran out in the

⁹ National Nutrition and Micronutrient Survey Sri Lanka 2022; Department of Nutrition, Medical Research Institute, Ministry of Health, in collaboration with WFP and UNICEF, retrieved from: <http://www.mri.gov.lk/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/National-Nutrition-and-Micronutrient-Survey-Sri-Lanka-2022.pdf>

¹⁰ Nutrition Status and Gaps in the Diet of Sri Lankans during the Pre-economic crisis period (from September to December 2021); Department of Nutrition, Medical Research Institute, Ministry of Health, in collaboration with WHO and UNICEF, 2022

¹¹ National Nutrition and Micronutrient Survey Sri Lanka 2022; Department of Nutrition, Medical Research Institute, Ministry of Health, in collaboration with WFP and UNICEF

¹² National Nutrition Month Report of June 2023: <https://docs.google.com/viewerng/viewer?url=https://fhb.health.gov.lk/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Nutrition-Month-2023-Report-English.pdf>

¹³ FHB Dashboard https://fhb.health.gov.lk/stat_dashboard_fhb.html

hospitals. To date there were no reports of clinics or hospitals closing, however severe shortages in medicines and other commodities in hospitals were reported.

All essential health services were severely impacted by the crisis, affecting hundreds and thousands of patients, including mothers, children, service seekers and health workers. Measures have been taken to re-distribute emergency drugs within hospitals to address the current shortages. There were reports that some hospitals have cancelled routine surgeries to save essential medicines for emergency surgeries. The Ministry of Health identified the essential drugs that would be in short supply/out of stock on a regular basis. Donor agencies were regularly informed of the stock out status in the hospitals in the country. Based on the requests from the Ministry of Health, Medical Supplies Division, UNICEF supported in the procurement of essential medicines to be used in health care facilities. The essential medicines procured were distributed to 51 hospitals across the country and were used in the management of 31,530 patients.

Since 2019, Sri Lanka has been a measles-eliminated country; however, beginning in May 2023, an outbreak was reported. To control the current outbreak, the National Immunization Technical Advisory Group (NITAG) recommended vaccination of all children between the ages of six to nine months in selected high-risk districts and vaccination of zero dose children aged between 9 months to 15 years. UNICEF supported the campaign, mainly in ensuring effective communication, and continues to work with the Epidemiology Unit of the MoH in addressing vaccine hesitancy in the identified populations.

Nutrition

UNICEF supported the procurement of Ready to Use Therapeutic Food (RUTF) BP-100 for the treatment of Severe Acute Malnutrition (SAM) in under-5 children throughout Sri Lanka. All children diagnosed with SAM are referred for treatment at a specialized centre in a hospital for management (Paediatric or Nutrition clinic). As most of the children detected with SAM are unable to reach the referred hospital for treatment, UNICEF, through locally recruited Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), supported parents to transport their children to the referral centres and outreach clinics for further management. In 2023, UNICEF supported 16,516 children affected by SAM to enrol for clinical management in 25 districts in the country. Further, all children at 6, 12, and 18 months were provided with Multiple Micronutrients (MMN) for two months to improve the micronutrient status. Further, caregivers of children received awareness on how MMN can be given to children 6-24 months with complimentary food provided to the child.

Under the nutrition sensitive humanitarian cash transfer programme, a cash plus component was developed to enhance the nutritional outcomes through home visits, cash management trainings to improve the financial management of the family income, food demonstrations to introduce appropriate complementary feeding and dietary practices and built capacities of the frontline workers involved in the multisectoral approach to nutrition. These activities will be continuing in the first quarter of 2024 in the selected nine districts. During 2023, 89,245 households were visited by the local animators through the partnership with CSOs. During these visits, nutrition sensitive calendars were also distributed, and nutrition promotion activities were conducted in two rounds. Cash management training has directly reached 4,984 community members in the targeted nine districts. UNICEF linked these emergency activities with the existing programmes, namely the strengthening of mother support groups, and the implementation of the multisectoral action plan through the combined mechanism to ensure sustainability.



UNICEF procured BP-100 for treating children under 5 diagnosed with SAM

With UNICEF's support, Early Childhood Development (ECD) authorities in Uva, Central, and Sabaragamuwa provinces provided school meal programmes to 18,035 preschool children in 652 preschools during 2023. These preschools are located in the tea estates and most of them cater for the disadvantaged children of families living within the estates but not employed by the estates. A preschool-enrolled child's mother was selected to prepared meals for the preschool. Upon selecting the meal provider, the Public Health Inspector (PHI) of the area visited the house and provided recommendations for maintaining hygiene throughout the process. The same PHI would continue to visit the location periodically to ensure adherence of hygiene conditions. ECD authorities conducted orientation programs for the teachers of all selected preschools to raise awareness on the required hygiene conditions and payments processes. The preschool meal menu, which was developed by the Children's Secretariate, was customized by consulting with the

provincial health authorities and adopted for the preschool meal program. The programme has observed an increased and sustained number of children regularly attending preschool, visible improvement of their physical and psychosocial conditions, and increased nutrition and education awareness among preschool teachers, parents, and school communities.

In the Eastern Province, a UNICEF-supported preschool meal program has benefited 30,121 children, with 15,722 in the Ampara district, 6,749 in the Batticaloa district, and 7,650 in the Trincomalee district. The program is overseen by the respective District Secretaries, and meals were primarily supplied by parents chosen through a preschool-level meeting. Reimbursements follow government procedures via divisional secretariats and occur monthly due to administrative complexities. Local health authorities monitor health and nutrition aspects, while ECD officers and government authorities engage in regular supervision during field trips. Despite challenges in meal monitoring and timely payments, preschool attendance and parental participation have seen positive increases. Further, the authorities continue to encourage preschool and home gardening in participating preschools.

Additionally, mid-day meals were provided to 37 preschools and four -day care centres in Colombo, managed by the



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UNICEF provided pre-school meals programme ensured nutritious diets for children under 5

Colombo Municipal Council (CMC), until 30 April 2023. In addition, dry ration packs were provided for the same children to maintain proper nutrition during the government school holiday in the month of May. An estimated 1,290 urban-poor preschool aged children, including 20 children with disabilities, benefited from these activities. Acknowledging the positive, multi-faced effects of the programme on children's school attendance and development, the CMC has allocated government funding to continue the meal program from June 2023 onwards including in 2024. To ensure the sustainability of these activities, with UNICEF's support, all public health staff attached to the CMC were trained on the importance of having a balanced nutrition during the preschool age. UNICEF also introduced drama

therapy as one of the highly effective modalities to disseminate messages to the urban poor population with low literacy levels. The Public Health staff attached to the CMC can continue to use this newly introduced drama therapy for public awareness programs on nutrition.

Child Protection

UNICEF continuously helps to establish, coordinate and manage the protection sector response among key stakeholders, including monitoring the impact on child protection and gender-based violence. UNICEF undertook an assessment of the routine data collection system for child protection, which provided baselines on key indicators, and which would support the government to regularly collect and disaggregate data on child protection. The final report was published on International Children's Day in November 2023, with the support of the Ministry of Justice. UNICEF continued to strengthen the online case management system, which was introduced in response to COVID-19, through the development and roll-out of Standard Operating Procedures and by training Child Protection Officers on how to use the online system. 682 children (317 boys and 365 girls, including nine children with disabilities) received from governmental and non-governmental organizations emergency case management and family-strengthening support to help reduce protection risks.

To address the growing concerns around children's mental health due to the economic crisis, UNICEF facilitated Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) services, including through the training of 96 government officers and front-line workers. In the Northern, Eastern, Uva, and Central Provinces, UNICEF helped establish mental health coordination networks to strengthen divisional-level psychosocial capacities benefitting 1,652 children (713 boys and 939 girls) and 612 parents/primary caregivers, with another 107 children receiving individual psychosocial support.

UNICEF also supported different community outreach modalities to provide psychosocial support. In the Eastern province, 'Listening Places' continue to function in targeted locations to help identify children who need support and provide psychological first aid¹⁴, as well as promote play and recreational activities. In the Northern province, the child befriender network continued, providing 287 children with psychosocial support and referred 36 for specialized services. UNICEF also supported the training of 70 Probation Officers and Child Rights Promotion Officers (CRPOs) in the Uva

¹⁴ Psychological First Aid (PFA) involves humane, supportive and practical assistance for people who are distressed, while maintaining their dignity, culture and abilities (WHO).

and Central provinces as trainers and mentors to provide peer support and psychological first aid. These officers conducted field-level training for 112 youth leaders (Prefects in schools and leaders of children's clubs) on peer support mechanisms, including psychological first aid for at-risk peers. Further, UNICEF helped establish 12 Village Child Development Committees and eight Children's Clubs to help identify and address mental health and psychosocial issues faced by children.

The COVID-19 crisis and the ongoing economic crisis highlighted the need for strong business continuity plans to be in place to ensure that vulnerable children continue to receive protection support they need even in times of crisis. In this regard, UNICEF is continuing to support the National Child Protection Authority (NCPA) and the Department of Probation and Child Care Services to roll out their business continuity plan in response to a crisis and any ensuing country lockdown or restriction of movement. The plan includes uninterrupted child helpline services during an emergency, for which six interns were recruited to support the 1929 child helpline¹⁵. Further, relevant infrastructure was also put in place, helping reach an estimated 386 children with referral support and follow-up services.

Education



Provision of learning materials to primary school students

The learning continuity program was implemented in 271 schools in the Uva and Central provinces to help 24,569 (12,530 girls and 12,039 boys) students from grades one to four in type three schools¹⁶ of rural and estate areas, to help catch up on their lost learning. The provinces were selected based on the vulnerability criteria used in the Humanitarian Needs and Priorities appeal in 2022. The program was implemented two days per week after school hours, one hour for grades one and two and one and a half hours for grades three and four. Students were provided with a snack to help them stay for the extended learning hours and teachers were provided with an additional allowance for travel purposes. As per the observations and feedback received from each zone, this program was very successful. Students were highly motivated to attend school and had requested

the teachers to implement this program on a daily basis. Teachers were also happy with this process since this is a different experience for them. Some teachers had commenced using this approach in their normal teaching process after learning of the benefits of using the new methodologies. This facilitated a dialogue with the Ministry of Education (MoE) and the National Institute of Education (NIE) in incorporating the identified teaching methodologies into the mainstream approach.

At the national level, UNICEF supported the roll-out of the psychosocial guidelines, through developing a roll-out strategy built in consensus with provincial counterparts. A total of 6,650 teachers across the nine provinces have been trained so far by the provincial resource teams and a cascade mode has been adapted to train more teachers at school levels. Through the trained teachers, over 950,000 secondary students had benefited with MHPSS counselling in schools. This work has gained appreciation at the MoE and provinces as a timely intervention to address the emerging psychosocial issues caused by the COVID-19 pandemic followed by the economic crisis.

In the Eastern province, the literacy and numeracy programme which started in 2022 to support learning recovery targeting an identified 6,650 under-performing primary students, marked a remarkable success. The end-line assessment found that 74 per cent and 86 per cent of the targeted students enhanced numeracy and literacy skills, respectively. As a result, the remaining 1,346 students have continued the programme in 2023. In addition, in 2023, UNICEF provided vital support to the Eastern Provincial Department of Education (PDE) in conducting a diagnostic assessment among 117,548 (59,949 girls and 57,599 boys) primary grade students (Grade 1-5). The analysis aimed to establish a baseline for another cohort of students in literacy and numeracy for both Tamil and Sinhala schools. The assessment revealed that certain students faced challenges with foundational skills, including between 4.2 per cent to 14.4 per cent achieving less than 50 marks. Consequently, the PDE identified an additional 4,818 children from 233 schools to receive remedial support with the assistance of UNICEF. The programme included sensitization for 17 zonal primary officials, awareness for 233 school principals, and a two-day refresher training for 235 teachers, focusing on

¹⁵ ChildLine 1929 is a private and confidential service for child related inquiries and reporting any child protection cases.

¹⁶ Type 3 schools are the schools having classes up to Grade 5 or Grade 8. According to the School Census 2021, there are 653,503 students learning in 3,968 type 3 schools across the country.

multi-level training encompassing integration remedial approaches, inclusiveness, positive disciplining, functional skills, and activity-based teaching. Moreover, implementation instructions were provided to classroom teachers for the provision of additional learning activities and support to the targeted children.

Furthermore, in the Eastern province, 26,014 individual children learner kits and 500 teacher kits were provided to needy schools and children who have lost both parents, come from single-parent families or are poor. UNICEF also provided exercise books among 44,000 primary students and 1,907 teacher kits in Uva, Central and Sabaragamuwa provinces as additional support for continuing their education.

To address learning loss in foundational literacy and numeracy, with the support of UNICEF the MoE launched a national learning recovery strategy (2023-2025) based on the RAPID Framework targeting students in Grades one to five. For the first time, all provinces developed their learning recovery programmes with alignment to a standardised national framework. UNICEF financially and technically supported the implementation of action plans and strengthened the assessment frameworks in line with the newly formulated key performance indicators for education.

While the prolonged economic crisis posed challenges for learning continuity and quality, it also provided UNICEF with opportunities to gain experience on the nexus between humanitarian and development work. Through initiatives such as learning recovery together with the Ministry of Education, UNICEF was able to create important linkages between providing support to the most vulnerable children, i.e., students who were not achieving the essential learning competencies, and overall system strengthening related to improving the quality of learning, i.e., pedagogy, assessments, and monitoring.

WASH

UNICEF supported 20 poor urban settlements in the Colombo District to improve the hygiene conditions of households including Menstrual Hygiene with a special focus on adolescent girls (6,000 girls). The hygiene promotion programme conducted by the Urban and Estate Health Unit and Health Promotion Bureau mainly promoted oral health and hand hygiene by supplying hygiene items, awareness material, and behaviour change monitoring tools. A Training of Trainers programme was conducted for the Development Officers of the Urban Settlement Development Authority to promote hygiene knowledge.

UNICEF supported the Ministry of Health to develop WASH standards and monitoring indicators for the integration of WASH indicators into Health Management Information Systems (HMIS). Two workshops have been conducted at the national level to finalize standards and monitoring indicators related to WASH in Health Care Facilities. An estimated hundred health staff were trained in Health Care Waste Management in 12 districts. Provincial-level health staff (40) were trained to conduct provincial-level healthcare waste assessment and develop a provincial-level healthcare waste management plan in each province (nine provinces). Further, support was provided to The Ministry of Health to strengthen coordination with provincial-level healthcare facilities by purchasing online communication facilities (zoom package for one year) and facilitating online training.

116 health clinics were supported to provide WASH facilities through which around 120,000 people benefited (including under-5 years old children, pregnant and lactating mothers, well-women clinic clients, and family planning clients). Around 30,000 beneficiaries (including under-5-year children, pregnant and lactating mothers, well-women clinic clients, and family planning clients) were reached with hygiene items in 28 clinics. Additionally, four hospitals were supported with improving their sanitation facilities.

UNICEF worked with the Directorate of Estate & Urban Health of the Ministry of Health, Urban Settlement and Development Authority, Health Promotion bureau and Planation Human Development Trust to implement a hygiene promotion programme in urban and estate sectors. Vulnerable families with undernourished children in poor urban settlements (3,000 families) and the estate sector (39,500 families) were targeted to promote hygiene practices as well as to distribute hygiene items and Information booklets on hand washing and personal hygiene through the child Development Centers.

Cash-based Programming

UNICEF provided nutrition-sensitive cash transfers to families with young children for five months. The aim was to increase the purchasing power and knowledge of women/caretakers with young children to access nutritious foods and essential health and nutrition services, and ultimately improve child and maternal diets. In addition to the cash assistance,

families received nutrition-relevant and age-appropriate messages, information and communication materials, and regular home visits.

Children were eligible for the programme when (1) they are born between 1 May 2021 and 31 December 2022, thereby prioritizing an age that is in the formative stage of life and hence particularly vulnerable and (2) the households reside in one of the most vulnerable districts in terms of the prevalence of severe wasting (based on Demographic and Health Surveys 2016 data, data available when the programme was designed). The targeted districts are Anuradhapura, Kegalle, Kilinochchi, Monaragala, Mullaitivu, Nuwara Eliya, Puttalam, Ratnapura, and Vavuniya. Each eligible child received a monthly benefit amount of LKR 6,750 (approximately US\$21.50) for 5 months, in most cases via bank transfers. The beneficiary registration was coordinated by district authorities in close collaboration with UNICEF. UNICEF supported the registration planning process through the in-depth training of enumerators on a UNICEF-developed digital data collection tool. Frontline workers such as Public Health Midwives and Development Officers, nominated by districts, worked as enumerators.

By end of 2023, 114,143 registrations had been completed. A total volume of nearly US\$12.5 million was disbursed to 113,481 households including 115,093 eligible children (58,191 boys and 56,902 girls). The remaining caseload was processed in the following weeks.

Communications for Development (C4D), Accountability to Affected Population

Together with the Ministry of Health, UNICEF supported strengthening and mobilizing the Mother Support Groups (MSGs), as a community-level platform to promote health and nutrition, especially targeting pregnant and lactating mothers and children under 5 years. This intervention, which reached over 200,000 and engaged over 90,000 individuals, focused on establishing new MSGs and reactivating existing groups; improving the monitoring of MSG activities at the ground level; promoting financial management as an approach to sustain health and nutrition during economic crisis; and to introduce locally developed cereal products (nutritional snacks) through locally available ingredients, mainly targeting children with nutritional problems. During the intervention, the number of available MSGs in the country increased by 85 per cent.

Furthermore, UNICEF collaborated with Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement (a local CSO) and established 256 village-level health promotion networks in 2023. Together with the ground-level public health officials, UNICEF capacitated and mobilized an approximate 3,840 community leaders attached to these networks in health and nutrition-related areas. Further, over 97,000 community members were reached through the community actions conducted by these networks to promote health and nutrition; and 94 per cent of these networks were able to connect with the public health system in their areas. Understanding the potential of youth as change agents, UNICEF partnered with YouPAH (a local CSO) to mobilize youth to improve nutrition and food security through community actions by capacitating and mobilizing 50 youth teams. UNICEF also engaged to capacitate scout leaders; and to mobilize them in initiating scouts-led community actions to improve food security and nutrition in communities, which engaged over 4,000 Scouts and Scout Leaders.

UNICEF collaborated with the Provincial Council of the Northern Province to introduce a Participatory Community Appraisal (PCA) model to improve community participation in the sub-national planning process. A contextualized model of PCA was introduced after a rigorous consultation process with the provincial officials; 185 front-line workers were trained; and a pool of master trainers was developed. UNICEF also recommended the required amendments to the existing planning procedure(s) of the province to institutionalize the model and to improve community participation in planning for development and emergencies.

UNICEF amplified the voices of young people through U-Report, a mobile messaging platform aimed to engage young people in programme priorities, emergency response and advocacy actions. UNICEF conducted opinion polls to understand the effects of the socio-economic crisis, provided key related information, and promoted the voices of young people in areas including corporal punishment, poverty, climate change and disasters, and water source protection by reaching 15 million and by engaging 2.9 million individuals through social media. Usage of U-Report to rally young people with 'Sri Lanka Children's Declaration on Disaster Risk Reduction and Climate Change Adaptation' was awarded as the 'Best in Emergency Innovation' during the Inspire Awards 2023 ceremony – an annual internal awards programme organized to recognize UNICEF campaigns and initiatives in fundraising, advocacy, communication, and engagement. Together with the partners, U-Report Sri Lanka conducted a digital boot camp to groom and equip 25 young people as digital advocates, with whom U-Report Sri Lanka plans to engage in moving forward to scale up the voices of young people.

As a result of the economic crisis, the platforms children have to share their voices were restricted (mainly with the reduction of the physical spaces). Together with the Department of Probation and Child Care Services (DPCCS), UNICEF promoted Digital Storytelling, as an effective approach to improve Child Participation UNICEF conducted a national level validation programme and provincial level ToTs by capacitating over 600 Children's Club members and Child Rights Promotion Officers. This intervention provides and enables young people to share their voices during this difficult context. The best digital stories developed by the children were recognized during the International Children's Day event, and UNICEF plans to expand this programme to Children's Club network during the next year.

With support from the UNICEF Regional Office for South Asia, UNICEF Sri Lanka conducted a capacity-building workshop on Accountability to Affected People (AAP) targeting 40 participants from Government, CSOs and UN agencies. Together with the MoH, UNICEF conducted two national level ToTs on strengthening AAP as an active commitment in the health system targeting 60 national level and subnational level health officials. UNICEF plans to expand this initiative to sub national level during 2024 based on the action plans developed during the ToTs. Together with the Urban Development Settlement Authority, UNICEF conducted a training for 30 social mobilizers on strengthening AAP during their work with the urban underserved communities. The programmes were aimed to facilitate a systematic, predictable, and responsive process of addressing feedback or complaints; and contribute to ensuring the crisis response and recovery efforts are more accountable.

UNICEF supported the development of positive parenting manuals during this period and this manual was launched in June 2023. Around 1,000 parents were reached through positive parenting during the period. As part of the positive parenting promotions, the prevention of corporal punishment webinar was conducted in April 2023 with around 100 Government, INGO, and NGO participants.

Ensuring AAP in the context of the nutrition-sensitive cash transfer programme, UNICEF partnered with the local civil society organization Sarvodaya. This included communication about the programme to ensure that no one is left behind, receiving feedback and complaints (through a toll-free hotline, text messages, and by email), and Focus Group Discussions.

Humanitarian Leadership, Coordination and Strategy

UNICEF is leading four sectors and one Area of Responsibility (AoR): the Protection sector, including the Child Protection AoR, Nutrition sector, Education sector, and WASH sector. Child Protection AoR and the Education sector leadership are co-led with Save the Children while the WASH sector is co-led with the Ministry of Water Supply. The nutrition sector is co-led with WFP to ensure close collaboration with the food security sector. As the economic crisis stabilized by early 2023, the Humanitarian Country Team led by UNICEF Representative as the UN Resident Coordinator a.i. and guided and coordinated by UNOCHA, took the decision to scale down humanitarian response operations by March 2023. The Inter-Agency Appeal (Humanitarian Needs and Priorities 2022) was not extended to 2023 but a 3-month extension period from Jan-March 2023 was granted to all humanitarian agencies to complete implementation of all humanitarian operations. UNICEF co-led sectors and AoR are all part of the Inter-Sector Working Group (ISWG) led by the Resident Coordinator's Office (RCO) at the national level, based on the guidance provided in the transition strategy i.e. Humanitarian Response and Coordination in 2023. UNICEF actively participates in the in-country inter-agency PSEA Task Force as well. UNICEF also leads and coordinates the UN Communications Group which supports the UN Country Team on humanitarian communication and advocacy.

Human Interest Stories and External Media

External Media

- [Little Vishnu is ready to learn and thrive! | UNICEF Sri Lanka](#)
- [Kaveena bounces back to a healthy childhood | UNICEF Sri Lanka](#)
- [Access to Education for All: Home-Based Learning Supports Learning Continuity During Crisis](#)
- [Pre-school meals means so much more to Dinithi and her friends](#)
- [Recognizing UNICEF Sri Lanka's Empowerment of Youth Engagement and Drive for Social Norm Change](#)
- [UNICEF's Cash Transfer Programme brings hope to vulnerable families with young children in Sri Lanka](#)
- [Incredible talents of youth harnessed through the power of digital storytelling](#)
- [Driving positive change at the grassroots level with Scouts](#)
- [How do young people define poverty | U-Report Sri Lanka](#)
- [Do you think Corporal Punishment is needed to discipline a child? | U-Report Sri Lanka](#)
- [Challenges for children hit hard, in my home Sri Lanka | UNICEF South Asia](#)

Next SitRep: July 2024

UNICEF Sri Lanka Crisis: [SRI LANKA CRISIS: | UNICEF Sri Lanka](#)

UNICEF Sri Lanka Humanitarian Action for Children Appeal: [Sri Lanka Appeal | UNICEF](#)

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Summary of Programme Results (as of 31 December 2023)

Sector		Total needs	UNICEF and IPs Response			Sector Response		
			2023 target	Total results	Change* ▲ ▼	2023 sector target	Total results	Change* ▲ ▼
Indicator								
Health								
# of children and women accessing primary health care in UNICEF-supported facilities	people	1,967,858	1,236,480	31,530 ¹⁷	(111,470)			
Nutrition								
# children 6 - 59 months with severe wasting admitted for treatment	children and women	2,810,062	47,567 ¹⁸	16,516 ¹⁹	7,304	47,567	16,516	4516
# of children aged 6 to 24 months receiving multiple micronutrient powders			430,000	508,872	221,872	430,000	508,872	78,872
# of primary caregivers of children aged 0 to 23 months receiving IYCF counselling			320,000	378,000	91,000	320,000	378,000	58,000
# of pre-school children reached through school feeding programmes (age group 2 - 5 years)			100,000	49,446	0	100,000	49,446	49,446
Child Protection								
# of children and parents/caregivers accessing mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS)	children and parents/caregivers	1,994,000	1,994,400 ²⁰	952,551	950,000	1,994,400	952,551	947,270
# of children who have received individual case management includes: # (women), girls and boys accessing GBV risk mitigation, prevention and/or response intervention			5000 (CM) including 400(GBV)	682	0	5,000	2,235	0

¹⁷ During mid-year 2023 reporting, the number of children and women accessing primary healthcare included those who benefitted through the funds received via ACT-A HAC, GAVI and COVAX facilities. This has been corrected at year-end reporting, and therefore, a reduction of total result is mentioned here. The total Health sector results by all stakeholders through HAC and ACT-A HAC facilities had reached 1,250,143 women and children.

¹⁸ SAM target was based on an estimate using Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) in 2016.

¹⁹ During the Nutrition month 2022, where 99% of under 5 children monitored, SAM total number detected was 18,420. UNICEF focused in 7 provinces with the case load of 12,267 SAM children. The government authorities have shared information on 11,843 SAM children till 30th June 2023. out of them 9212 Children were enrolled for treatment. Children who have passed 59 months of age at time the data was shared were not enrolled for treatment as per protocol. There are new cases identified in some provinces also included. Based on the data shared by government and reports from UNICEF CSO partners 78% (9,212*100/11,843) of the SAM Children in UNICEF targeted 7 provinces were admitted for treatment.

At the end of 2024 16,516 SAM children enrolled for treatment and the programme also expanded to southern and western provinces covering the entire 9 provinces in the country. During nutrition month June 2023 fresh data was gathered by ministry of health and released on September 2023 which recorded 15,758 SAM children aged 6-59 months.

²⁰ 1.9 million students in secondary schools are expected to be reached through this intervention, in addition to community-based MHPSS interventions.

# of children and adults have access to safe and accessible channels to report sexual exploitation and abuse (PSEA)			2,000	386	0	3,000	781	0
# of girls and boys assisted through access to assistive devices and specialized services			2,000	156	0	4,000	816	0
Education								
# of children accessing formal or non-formal primary or secondary education	Children	1,128,580	665,690	30,733	0	665,690	30,733	0
# of children receiving individual learning materials (teaching-learning materials)			665,690	70,014	16,734	665,690	70,014	16,734
WASH								
# people accessing sufficient quantity of safe water for drinking, cooking and personal hygiene	people	2,575,620	200,000	120,000	0	200,000	152,000	32,000
# children accessing appropriate WASH facilities and hygiene services in learning facilities and safe spaces			50,000	0 ²¹	0	50,000	5,945	5,945
# girls and women accessing menstrual hygiene management services			5,000	6,000	0	5,000	6,000	0
# people reached with critical WASH supplies (including hygiene items)			400,000	158,000	134,000	400,000	158,000	134,000
Social Protection			655,000					
# of households reached with UNICEF-funded humanitarian cash transfers	mothers	480,187	121,796	113,481	42,910			
C4D, Community Engagement and AAP								
# of parents and caregivers provided with messages on positive parenting and MHPSS	people	500,000	35,000	1,000	0			
# of people with access to established feedback and accountability mechanisms			110,000	114,067	439			
# people reached through messaging on prevention and access to services			500,000	8.6 million ²²	2.6 million			

²¹ The relevant interventions have not been funded by existing donor proposals.

²² This includes the people reached through Social & Behavior Change interventions in areas related to Community Engagement, Health & Nutrition, and Digital Engagement (including the reach achieved through U-Report social media platforms)

Funding Status*

Sector	Requirements	Funds available			Funding gap	
		Humanitarian resources received in 2023	Other resources used in 2023	Resources available from 2022 (Carry-over)	\$	%
Nutrition	6,432,900	2,165,618	252,167	7,037,411	0	0
Health	2,337,000	116,811	0	9,259	2,210,930	95
Water, sanitation and hygiene	984,000	545,748	0	0	438,253	45
Child Protection, GBViE & PSEA	2,494,440	198,000	0	518,241	1,778,199	71
Education	6,455,040	0		182,913	6,272,127	97
Social Protection	9,319,232	0	0	13,858,081	0	0
Cross-sectoral (C4D, RCCE & AAP)	246,000	14,000	0	0	232,000	94
Total	28,268,612	3,540,099	252,167	21,605,905	10,449,080	37

* As defined in Humanitarian Appeal of 5 December 2022 for a period of 12 months