

CYCLONE DITWAH

2 December 2025



Situation in Numbers¹



275,025 Children
Affected (estimated)



1,466,615 People
Affected



410 Deaths



336 People Missing



1,441 Safety Centres



233,015 People in Safety
Centres

Highlights

- Cyclone Ditwah made landfall on the East coast of Sri Lanka in the early morning of 28 November 2025, causing widespread floods and deadly landslides across the nation. Nearly 1.5 million people are affected, including an estimated 275,000 children to date, with 410 deaths, 336 missing, and 233,015 people displaced in 1,441 government-run safety centres. Many more are reported to stay with host families.
- Water supply is disrupted nationwide, hospitals are flooded and struggling to function, and many schools are damaged. Access remains challenging, complicating search, rescue and relief operations.
- There is an urgent need for safe drinking water, sanitation and hygiene supplies to prevent disease outbreaks, as well as access to child protection, health, nutrition, and education services.
- Working closely with Government authorities to provide lifesaving response, UNICEF delivered bottled water to isolated districts and distributed hygiene items. Additional supplies, including chlorine for water purification and water purification tablets, are on their way. Child-friendly spaces and MHPSS messaging have been activated.
- To respond to the urgent needs of children and families in the hardest-hit districts, UNICEF is further scaling up its efforts and appealing for additional resources

Situation Overview & Humanitarian Needs

The impacts of Cyclone Ditwah continue to increase, with emerging data indicating that it is one of Sri Lanka's worst flood disasters in two decades. The cyclone made landfall in Sri Lanka on 28 November, before moving back over the Bay of Bengal.

¹ Disaster Management Center, Situation Report on 2 December 2025, at 10:00 hours

By 2 December, 410 deaths and 336 missing persons have been reported across 25 districts, with almost 1.5 million people affected and over 233,015 displaced to safety centres. Population impacts remain heaviest in Gampaha, Colombo, Puttalam, and Mannar, alongside Trincomalee and Batticaloa. Landslides and flash floods in several central hill country regions have caused extensive loss of life, particularly in Kandy, Badulla, and Matale.

Initial assessments indicate that more than 15,000 homes have been destroyed and many more severely damaged across affected areas. Some 233,015 people are reported to be staying in the 1,441 government-led safety centers, while many more are reported to stay with host families. Critical infrastructure has suffered major disruption, with 206 roads rendered impassable, at least 10 bridges damaged, and sections of the rail network and power grid affected, including water systems and an inundated substation. Flooding along the Kelani River, the main river running through Colombo, and surrounding low-lying areas continues to hamper access, disrupt information flow from affected communities, and complicate search, rescue, and relief operations.

WASH

Water supply across all districts has been severely disrupted, leaving many communities without safe drinking water and increasing the risk of waterborne diseases. Critical infrastructure—including pump houses, panel rooms, and generator rooms—remains submerged, and power outages have further affected water pumping, treatment, and distribution. Significant impacts are reported in Sabaragamuwa, Eastern, Uva, and Central provinces, with 85 major urban water schemes and 537 rural schemes damaged. In Badulla, about 95 per cent of water supply is interrupted, with limited supply reaching only the hospital. Nearly 235,875 household connections are affected in urban areas. Many rural dug wells are inundated, causing access issues and increasing waterborne disease risks. There is a high demand for bottled potable water among displaced populations, but supplies are scarce due to flooded bottling plants. Several sewer treatment plants are non-functional, and sanitation facility damage is yet to be assessed. Immediate water provision is constrained by access issues, power failures, shortages of bottled water and treatment and testing chemicals, and limited availability of water bowsers.

Child Protection

Preliminary data from UNICEF and Civil Society Organization (CSO) partners indicate overcrowding in many safe centres operated by the government, combined with a lack of basic protection and Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) services, and a lack of recreational activities for children. Partners draw attention to mental health support needs among the affected children, caregivers, and first responders – both in safe spaces and those in communities. Children are among those who lost their lives, but the exact number remains unknown. There are no confirmed cases of separation reported yet. However, the capacity of the child protection workforce to receive information and respond to child separation cases has been limited due to severely affected mobile connectivity and road accessibility. The Child Protection Helpline is operational and is expected to receive calls as connectivity gradually resumes. The Department of Probation and Child Care Services is currently gathering additional data on child protection concerns. The emergency has affected children in institutional care: in Uva Province, 36 children from two childcare institutions have been moved to safety centres; in North Central Province, children from three homes have been relocated; and in Western Province, children from one home have been transferred; three homes in the Eastern Province are preparing to relocate children if the flood levels further rise.

Health and Nutrition

Severe flooding has inundated several major hospitals across Sri Lanka, while damaged supply routes and power outages have led to critical shortages of medicines and oxygen supplies. Many health facilities in affected districts are inaccessible, and emergency care for families, including pregnant women and young children, is being provided in temporary safety centres. The Ministry activated its emergency response mechanism, coordinating provincial and district health plans with disaster management units. Public health staff, including Medical Officers of Health, Public Health Inspectors, and Public Health Midwives, have been deployed to safety centres to provide emergency care, monitor high-risk patients such as pregnant mothers and young children, and support the prevention of disease outbreaks through surveillance. Field health teams are also assisting pregnant women unable to reach hospitals. Challenges persist in safe centres in ensuring exclusive breastfeeding due to the lack of private spaces and proper seating arrangements, as well as difficulties in providing adequate food and water for pregnant women and preparing complementary meals for young children.

Education

Many schools across the country have been inundated and damaged; however, the full impact on the education sector is still being assessed. Schools were closed for public exams at the time of the disaster and were scheduled to reopen on 8 December 2025. The Ministry aims to reopen schools on 16 December, where possible; however, many will likely struggle to do so because of damage to school infrastructure, putting children's learning at risk. The General Certificate of Education (Advanced Level) examinations, which began in mid-November, have been postponed indefinitely due to severe weather conditions. Many schools are currently being utilized as safety centres, and all early childhood development centres, including preschools, have been closed since 28 November 2025.

Summary Analysis of Programme Response

WASH

- At the request of local authorities, UNICEF has delivered 100 units of 5-litre water bottles to 25 safety centres in Badulla district, which remains cut off from the rest of the country, and 500 units of 5-litre water bottles to Kandy district. In response to a request from the Ampara District Secretariat, UNICEF has delivered 150 units of 5-litre and 1,000 units of 1.5-litre water bottles.
- UNICEF is procuring 24,100 kg of chlorine for water purification in community-based water supply schemes.
- Additional relief supplies being procured locally by UNICEF include 2,000 soaps and 700 buckets for Kandy and 4,000 sleeping mats, 4,000 bedsheets, 2,000 soaps, 4,000 towels, 700 buckets, 8,000 toothbrushes, 1,600 tubes of toothpaste, 3,000 sanitary napkin packets, 350 packs of baby diapers, and 700 large garbage bins for Badulla.
- The Ministry of Water Supply and UNICEF convened the first WASH sector meeting to coordinate the emergency response among partners.

Child Protection

- UNICEF is leveraging existing CSO partnerships to support government-led efforts by operating child-friendly spaces for displaced children and families, providing on-site and remote MHPSS activities, and ensuring protection services for children in institutional care who have been evacuated due to flooding.
- Within 48 hours of the onset of the displacement, MHPSS messages guiding parents and their children were disseminated in English, Sinhala, and Tamil through UNICEF's website and social media. UNICEF is working with partners to update the MHPSS message bank and prepare a psychological first aid package for first-line responders and volunteers.
- UNICEF has activated the protection sector, coordinating actors together with UNFPA in child protection and gender-based violence.

Nutrition

- UNICEF has prepositioned Ready-to-Use Therapeutic Food (RUTF) to ensure timely treatment of severe acute malnutrition (SAM).
- UNICEF is preparing communication to highlight the vital role of breastfeeding for infant survival and health during emergencies.
- UNICEF is leading nutrition sector coordination in response to the emergency, with the first meeting held on 29 November, including participation of UN and NGO partners, the Ministry of Health focal points on nutrition, the Nutrition Division, and the Family Health Bureau. Relevant government circulars and guidelines on child nutrition and feeding practices during emergencies were shared among sector partners.

Health

- In response to a request from the Ministry of Health, UNICEF is supporting the procurement of 50,000 kg of Tropical Chloride of Lime (TCL) and over 4,500 liter cans of Cresol and Soap, which are essential for cleaning surfaces affected by the flooding and cleaning water in the dug-wells.
- UNICEF is also procuring 1,000,000 Water Purification Tablets internationally.
- UNICEF is locally procuring 1,600 mosquito coil packets for Kandy district and 200 baby mosquito nets for Badulla district to protect against mosquito-borne diseases, with plans to increase distribution based on assessed needs and available funding.

Education

- UNICEF is procuring supply kits for students and for teachers to support the return to learning in the worst-affected school communities.
- UNICEF is working with the Ministry of Education to explore the use of digital platforms to ensure continuity of learning for children in safety centres and those whose schools have been severely damaged.
- An assessment led by UNICEF and the Ministry of Education, with the education sector partners, is underway to evaluate the number of schools, teachers, and children affected and the extent of the damage caused to the schools.
- With the Ministry of Education, UNICEF co-led the first meeting of the Education Sector to plan and coordinate the response interventions.

Social Protection

- UNICEF is working with other UN agencies to support the government to identify affected children, pregnant and lactating women, through secondary data analysis overlaying the actual data that is being shared by the Disaster Management Centre.
- UNICEF is exploring, together with WFP, the entry points to support improving the coverage of the affected population through different social protection schemes, particularly the nutritional food package for pregnant and lactating women.

Accountability to Affected Populations (AAP) and Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA)

- UNICEF has initiated communicating key life-saving information targeting the affected communities, including parents, using UNICEF's social media platforms and other channels.
- UNICEF has offered support to the government counterparts on strengthening AAP and assessing related needs.
- UNICEF is training volunteers and new implementing partners on PSEA.

Humanitarian Leadership, Coordination and Strategy

On 29 November the President of Sri Lanka declared a State of Emergency. UNICEF Sri Lanka is coordinating closely with the Government, national authorities, and international and local CSO and NGO partners to assess the situation and provide life-saving support.

The Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) has been re-activated,² with UNICEF leading the response in WASH, Nutrition, Education and Child Protection. Regular sector meetings are taking place to ensure joint assessments and coordinated response planning and implementation.

A Joint Rapid Needs Assessment in close coordination with the Disaster Management Centre (DMC) is being carried out, based on which the HCT will develop and issue a costed Joint Response Plan (JRP).

² For more information on the Humanitarian coordination, please see Flash Updates [1,2](#), and [3](#) of the United Nations Sri Lanka, Office of the Resident Coordinator.

Human Interest Stories and External Media

[UNICEF is deeply concerned with the devastation caused by #cycloneDitwah](#)

[Emma Brigham, Representative, UNICEF Sri Lanka interview on ABC-Australia](#)

[Filed Video account from UNICEF Child Protection Officer](#)

[UNICEF delivers portable water to displaced people in 25 centres, despite access constraints](#)

[Talking to you children by the cyclone disaster](#)

[Coping as a caregiver during a disaster.](#)

Next Update: 5 December 2025

WHO TO CONTACT FOR FURTHER INFORMATION:

Emma Brigham
Representative
UNICEF Sri Lanka
Tel: +9477 373 3781
ebrigham@unicef.org

Begoña Arellano
Deputy Representative
UNICEF Sri Lanka
Tel: +9477 741 6734
barellano@unicef.org

Bismarck Swangin
Chief of Communication,
Advocacy and
Partnerships
UNICEF Sri Lanka
Tel: +94 777 236 548
bswangin@unicef.org

Watsala Jayamanna
Programme Officer
(Emergency)
UNICEF Sri Lanka
Tel: +9477 285 8949
wjayamanna@unicef.org