

**Spotlight on the Global Mental Health
Thematic Fund**

2025

Cover: Khujasta, 9, and Laila, 6, are happy at the UNICEF's Child-Friendly Space in Khas Kunar Camp in the Kunar province, Afghanistan.



Mental health and psychosocial well-being are integral to sustainable development. While explicitly recognized under SDG 3, mental health is an accelerator of progress across all 17 Sustainable Development Goals, influencing children's learning, protection, relationships, participation and future opportunities. The Global Mental Health Thematic Fund enables UNICEF to advance this multisectoral agenda, strengthening the systems and environments that help children, families and communities thrive

1. UNICEF's Global Mental Health Thematic Fund: Safeguarding the mental health and wellbeing of children and adolescents

The global case for investing in child and adolescent mental health has never been stronger. Across development, humanitarian and peace contexts, mental health and psychosocial wellbeing are increasingly recognized as foundational to children's ability to learn, develop and participate fully in their communities. Growing evidence of mental health conditions, including depression and anxiety and associated symptoms, suicidality, and psychosocial distress among children and adolescents across income levels, geographies and contexts has generated sustained political attention and growing recognition that mental health is a fundamental dimension of child wellbeing, education, protection and health. Yet, the gap between political commitment and

adequately resourced, quality-assured service delivery has never been more visible.

In 2025, children's mental health was tested by converging pressures, including the escalation of armed conflict and mass displacement in Gaza, Sudan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ukraine, and Afghanistan; climate shocks that disrupted care systems and social cohesion across multiple regions; economic strain on families and communities; and the influence of digital environments on how young people experience stress, connection and support. Significant cuts to international aid in 2025 compounded these pressures, reducing the resources available to reach



Togo

The Child-Friendly Space set up in the prefecture of Tone by UNICEF offers children a safe, welcoming environment adapted to their psychosocial well-being.

children in some of the world's most affected settings. Where mental health services had been embedded within national systems, within health, education, and child protection entrypoints, they proved more resilient in the face of these pressures. Where they had not, reductions in external funding translated directly into service closure. The underlying logic is clear. Durable support requires sustained investment in systems that extends beyond individual projects and funding cycles.

UNICEF's Global Mental Health Thematic Fund is designed to support precisely this systems-level investment. More than a financing mechanism, the Fund is a catalyst for systemic change, enabling UNICEF to invest across health, education, protection and other sectors to build the governance, workforce and evidence infrastructure needed to integrate mental health and psychosocial support across national systems and community platforms. Rooted in equity, resilience and partnership, the Thematic Fund reflects a simple but powerful truth, that mental health is not a luxury – it is a right.

In 2025, thematic funding contributed, alongside other typologies of funding, to results reaching millions of children, adolescents and caregivers around the world. This report presents what that investment made possible, as well as the partners who made it happen.

2. Financial results

In 2025, the Global Mental Health Thematic Fund mobilized approximately US\$5.6 million in contributions from committed partners, a significant increase from 2024. UNICEF extends sincere appreciation to its private sector partners, including lululemon, Pinterest, Jo Malone London, Sony Group Corporation and others who contributed to the Fund, including through the National Committees, whose sustained commitment continues to drive this momentum forward.

This progress reflects more than resource mobilization. It signals deepening trust in UNICEF's leadership to transform systems and services across both development and humanitarian contexts, and growing recognition among partners that mental health is a fundamental component of child rights.

For every \$1 invested in selected mental health and psychosocial support interventions in schools and learning environments in emergencies, there is a projected \$24 return in health and economic benefits over a lifetime.¹

¹ UNICEF, 2022. The Global Costs and Benefits of Mental Health and Psychosocial Support Interventions in Schools and Learning Environments in Emergencies. New York: United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF).

"Your investment through the Mental Health Thematic Fund gives us the flexibility to respond quickly, support children and young people who need it most, and build stronger mental health services that last. It also helps us bring partners together through the Global Coalition for Youth Mental Health, showing what can be achieved when we work together to create meaningful change."

Kitty van der Heijden, Deputy Executive Director, Partnerships, UNICEF



Top Global Mental Health Thematic Fund partners by contributions received, 2025

Donor	Amount (US\$)
Netherlands	1,094,200
Dutch Committee for UNICEF	1,556,996
Japan Committee for UNICEF	958,605
United States Fund for UNICEF	492,225
United Kingdom Committee for UNICEF	429,486
Swedish Committee for UNICEF	392,000
Canadian UNICEF Committee	269,668
Committee for UNICEF Switzerland and Liechtenstein	180,000
Australian Committee for UNICEF Limited	59,665
Spanish Committee for UNICEF	59,299
UNICEF Ireland	49,202
Italian Committee for UNICEF – Foundation ETS	44,282
Korean Committee for UNICEF	13,052
UNICEF Hungarian Committee Foundation	7,218
Grand total	5,605,899

Note: Figures are indicative. Numbers may not add up due to rounding.

Why flexible funding matters

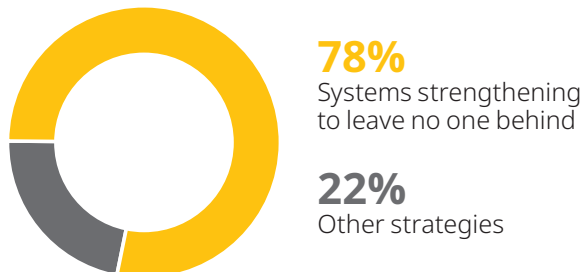
Not all funding works the same way. Flexible funding, which is funding not earmarked for a specific project, location or activity, is not a nice-to-have, but rather a structural necessity. Safeguarding children's mental health and psychosocial wellbeing requires sustained, system-level investment. Resources tied to specific activities, locations or partners cannot pivot when contexts change, when funding ends abruptly, or when the priority shifts from service delivery to systems strengthening.

What sets the Global Mental Health Thematic Fund apart is not just where the money goes, but how it works. Flexible contributions allow UNICEF to:

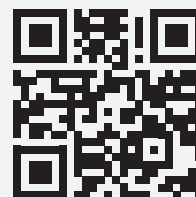
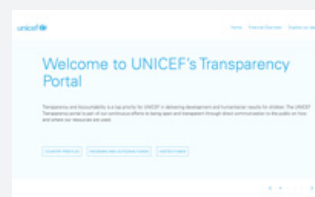
- Sustain hard-won results for children, as in **Mexico**, where thematic funding enabled a donor-funded initiative for children on the move to become an institutionalized, sustainably supported part of local services.
- Invest in the upstream conditions for lasting change, such as policy and legal reform, workforce strengthening, and evidence generation and use, such as in **Serbia**, where thematic resources supported UNICEF's sustained advocacy and technical assistance, contributing to the adoption of a government regulation establishing a dedicated Office for Support to Children and Youth in the Area of Mental Health, and to the rollout of the Youth Minimum Service Package across 10 per cent of municipalities.
- Respond rapidly to emerging priorities and shifting contexts, as in **Türkiye**, where thematic resources created the space to invest in national emergency preparedness when all other funding was committed to direct earthquake response delivery, and in Cambodia, where investment in personnel and systems meant UNICEF could immediately mobilize when a border crisis generated emergency mental health needs in late 2025.
- Lead and coordinate inter-agency coalitions, such as in the **Middle East and North Africa**, where thematic resources enabled UNICEF to convene partners and produce shared tools for frontline worker wellbeing at lower cost and wider reach than any single agency could achieve alone.
- Fill critical evidence gaps such as in **Albania**, where thematic resources enabled the first-ever global pilot of the BLOOM intervention for young children, and in Pakistan, where resources enabled the adaptation and implementation of the MMAPP data collection module in Rawalpindi, enabling the use of data to improve programme monitoring and learning, and data for decision-making.
- Sustain critical global coordination functions that underpin humanitarian response, such as essential support for the Inter-Agency Standing Committee

Reference Group on Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in Emergency Settings, which is the principal inter-agency platform for humanitarian coordination on mental health.

UNICEF expense by programme strategy, 2025



Approximately 77.7 per cent of programmatic thematic funding expenditure was directed to systems-strengthening strategies, including institutional strengthening of national systems, policy engagement, workforce development and policy reform. The remainder supported enabling strategies including advocacy and communications, social and behaviour change, data and analysis and service delivery. These investments accelerated the integration of mental health services across health, education, child protection and other cross-cutting areas, including peacebuilding, climate and gender. Every dollar spent moved UNICEF closer to its goal: safeguarding children's right to mental health.



The UNICEF's Transparency Portal

UNICEF has a strong financial transparency record, including for thematic funding. We encourage UNICEF partners to the Global Mental Health Thematic Fund to visit the [Transparency Portal](#) and access real-time information on spending in the countries receiving funds.



**Flexible funding.
Direct reach.
Real results for children.**

3. The reach of the Global Mental Health Thematic Fund

The Global Mental Health Thematic Fund operates across all seven UNICEF regions, with a footprint that spans some of the most complex and under-resourced contexts in the world. In 2025, its reach extended from post-conflict recovery settings in the Middle East to climate-affected communities in the Pacific, from national systems strengthening in the Balkans to youth-led mental health initiatives in Sub-Saharan Africa. What connects these investments is a core principle that sustainable mental health outcomes for children require not individual interventions, but coherent systems.

Across these programme areas, thematic funding contributed to a broader UNICEF-wide portfolio that in 2025 reached an estimated 53.7 million children, adolescents and caregivers with MHPSS services across more than 130 countries – including 25.7 million in humanitarian settings across 59 countries. Technical support was provided to governments and systems across all seven UNICEF regions.

These results reflect the incremental building of systems and system building blocks, including the governance, workforce, evidence and service infrastructure that will determine whether mental health support for children is available, accessible and sustained not just this year, but in the years ahead.

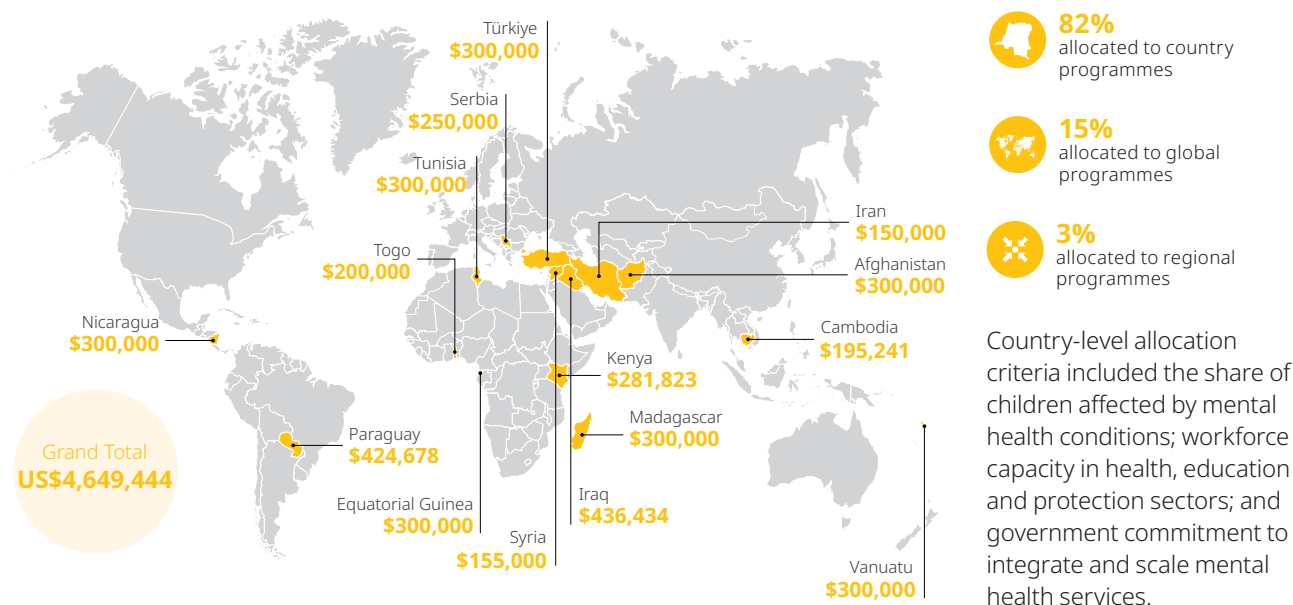
A multilevel approach to systems change

The Fund is deliberately structured to work across three mutually reinforcing levels:

- At the **country level**, thematic resources strengthen national systems, expand frontline capacity and ensure that the most vulnerable children, including those in humanitarian settings, can access the support they need through the platforms they already use.
- At the **regional level**, the Fund builds technical capacity across country offices, promotes cross-border learning and coordination, informs regional policy and accelerates the uptake of evidence-based practices at scale. In 2025, this included frontline worker wellbeing initiatives spanning Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, Libya and the West Bank.
- At the **global level**, it sustains UNICEF's leadership in developing guidance, measurement tools, data frameworks and normative standards that drive consistent, quality mental health and psychosocial support worldwide. In 2025, UNICEF took on the co-chair role of the main inter-agency coordination body for mental health and psychosocial support in emergencies.

These levels are interdependent. Global tools require trained frontline workers to deploy them. Frontline workforce capacity requires enabling national policy frameworks. National policies require evidence and financing commitments to be sustained. Thematic funding invests across all three levels in recognition of this interdependence.

The Global Mental Health Thematic Fund allocations around the world, 2025

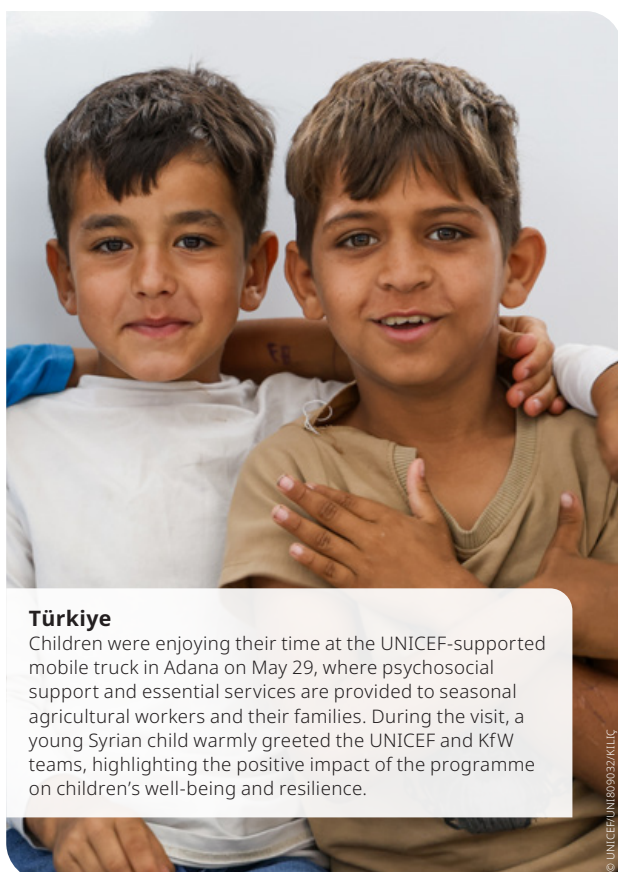


4. From programmes to policy: Driving systemic change in child and adolescent mental health

The scale of unmet need in child and adolescent mental health is vast, but UNICEF's response is equally bold. This shift is not just about reaching more children; it is about ensuring the systems and settings children rely on are better equipped and ready to deliver quality, rights-based support across relevant settings. The Global Mental Health Thematic Fund is supporting a paradigm shift from fragmented service delivery to strong, integrated systems that place mental health at the core of a child's right to survive and thrive.

UNICEF's systems-strengthening model is anchored in workforce development, policy and legislative reform, social and behaviour change, data and evidence, infrastructure for service delivery, and sustainable financing. In 2025, flexible funding played a catalytic role across UNICEF's broader mental health portfolio, helping drive results at scale through national systems and community platforms.

Below are headline results by programme area for which Global Mental Health thematic funding, as part of a broader portfolio of funding, was a key contributor.



Türkiye

Children were enjoying their time at the UNICEF-supported mobile truck in Adana on May 29, where psychosocial support and essential services are provided to seasonal agricultural workers and their families. During the visit, a young Syrian child warmly greeted the UNICEF and KfW teams, highlighting the positive impact of the programme on children's well-being and resilience.

Policy and governance

National policies, legislation and governance frameworks are among the most durable foundations for child and adolescent mental health systems, shaping financing priorities, service mandates and accountability structures in ways that outlast individual programmes or funding cycles.

When mental health is embedded in law, in national strategy and in public budgets, it is protected from the fluctuations of any single funding source. That protection is what thematic investment in policy and governance is ultimately building toward. In 2025, thematic funding supported policy advocacy and technical assistance across a range of country contexts, from the development of national preparedness frameworks to the institutionalization of child and adolescent mental health within government regulatory architecture.

In **Türkiye**, UNICEF supported the Ministry of Family and Social Services in preparing the country's mental health response for future emergencies, including the development of standard operating procedures for cross-sectoral emergency response and a national package of psychosocial support resources covering guidelines for supporting children and adults, group activity materials and staff wellbeing resources. A national workshop jointly conducted with the Ministry identified key challenges and gaps in cross-sectoral response at national and provincial levels and produced a prioritized workplan now guiding implementation. Flexible thematic funding was essential to this work: other funding was committed to direct earthquake response delivery, and the flexible allocation created the space to invest in lasting national preparedness capacity. In **Nicaragua**, UNICEF is commissioning a technical analysis of policies, programmes, institutional capacities and referral mechanisms across the health, education and child protection sectors, generating the evidence base needed to operationalize intersectoral coordination across three ministries. In **Madagascar**, a cross-sectoral coordination process in 2025 secured commitment across UNICEF sections and government focal points to advance mental health and psychosocial support implementation, laying the groundwork for a national thematic working group.

Two country experiences further illustrate what sustained thematic investment in policy and governance can produce when conditions are in place for it to translate into institutional change. In Iraq, thematic funding enabled UNICEF to support the national launch of the country's first guiding manual for mental health providers and psychologists working with children in post-conflict settings. UNICEF worked closely with government counterparts to finalize the technical content, validate it across sectors and support timely national dissemination. The manual



Syrian Arab Republic

Hamoud, 8, smiles during a group activity conducted by a UNICEF-supported team in his classroom in Rankus village, Rural Damascus, Syria on 19 October 2025. "What hurt me the most was watching Hamoud's back curve more and his condition deteriorate while I could do nothing to help," said Fatema, a mother from Rankus village in Rural Damascus. "We decided to stop Hamoud's treatment as mine was more critical. My heart was full of sadness."

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strengthens child protection case management by standardizing mental health and psychosocial support service delivery for children affected by violence, displacement and other protection risks, contributing to the institutionalization of these services within child protection and health systems. In **Serbia**, thematic investment in policy advocacy and technical assistance over a sustained period produced results that illustrate what the transition from external support to domestic ownership can look like. UNICEF's advocacy and technical assistance supported the implementation of a cross-ministerial plan of action coordinated across six ministries, and technical assistance to the Institute of Public Health produced a set of national and international mental health indicators, several already integrated into the national monitoring system, alongside a national Roadmap for improving the mental health of children and youth. The Government formalized these commitments by establishing, through regulation, the Office for Support to Children and Youth in the Area of Mental Health, a dedicated government structure mandated to coordinate preventive programmes, reduce stigma, strengthen quality assurance and foster cross-sectoral cooperation for children's mental health, with UNICEF recognized as a principal partner. This institutionalization of child and adolescent mental health within the Government's own regulatory architecture represents the kind of systemic change that thematic funding is designed to catalyze, which is a government-owned, government-financed institutional structure that will continue to function and develop beyond any individual funding cycle.

Workforce development and capacity strengthening

Behind every child who receives mental health support is someone who saw them, listened to them and knew how to help.

Front-line providers are the backbone of mental health systems. They need training, tools and support to respond with care, competence and confidence. Through the Global Mental Health Thematic Fund, UNICEF is investing in this essential human infrastructure, building national workforces that are skilled, supported and ready to deliver quality, rights-based care to children and caregivers in every setting.

In 2025, thematic funding supported workforce development across a range of country contexts. This included **Nicaragua**, where thematic resources supported the capacity building of frontline workers for the identification of mental health risk factors and timely referral, including the review of national guidelines and the delivery of mental health clinical history forms to municipal health units and psychosocial support centres. Similarly, in **Serbia**, 180 frontline professionals were trained and the Youth Minimum Service Package was rolled out across 10 per cent of municipalities, with evaluation confirming significant improvements in adolescent psychosocial wellbeing, while the peer support model "I Support My Friends" trained over 100 peer educators who subsequently reached more than 1,000 young people. Two country and regional experiences further illustrate the depth of what thematic investment in workforce development made possible in 2025.

In **Suriname**, thematic funding supported a coherent, cross-sectoral approach to mental health and psychosocial support spanning health, education and child protection systems, in close collaboration with government counterparts and community-based organizations. Under the health and systems strengthening component, 82 frontline workers across the health, education and social sectors in Nickerie district were trained on district-level mental health systems strengthening, including the development and validation of structured referral mechanisms and safeguarding tools, with the model now being scaled to Wanica and Commewijne districts. A Community of Practice network of 45 members was established to sustain intersectoral coordination, peer learning and case management, contributing to improved early identification, safe referral and continuity of care for vulnerable children and families. Through education sector entrypoints, a structured 12-week non-formal life skills and mental health programme was developed in partnership with the Ministry of Youth Development and Sport, reaching approximately 900 adolescents

through youth centres across five districts, with a standardized curriculum, facilitator manuals and a training-of-trainers package developed to underpin scale-up. Leveraging child protection entrypoints, 97 para-social workers and 27 community focal points were trained to provide psychosocial support and serve as links between communities and formal services, engaging caregivers and communities to promote protective environments and improved mental well-being for children. Across all three components, cross-cutting social and behaviour change interventions contributed to increased community dialogue, improved help-seeking behaviours and greater visibility of mental health services at community level. Flexible thematic funding was identified as essential to enabling the timely design, adaptation and scale-up of these interventions across sectors and districts.

In the **Middle East and North Africa region**, thematic funding addressed one of the most consistently underprioritized dimensions of mental health systems in humanitarian settings: the wellbeing of the frontline workers who continue to turn up for children despite being severely affected by crisis and conflict themselves. In a region where access constraints, mass displacement and chronic insecurity make every programmatic decision contingent on flexibility and inter-agency collaboration, thematic resources enabled UNICEF to sustain two complementary initiatives that together reached thousands of workers across multiple countries. The Tammeni Annak support package, targeting frontline workers exposed to chronic stress, grief and secondary traumatic stress, was scaled across Lebanon, Syria, Libya and the West Bank. The initiative provides facilitated safe spaces for reflection and strengthens collective coping and peer support systems, with specific adaptations for staff exposed to distressing content and high-risk operational environments. Approximately 4,494 frontline workers across sectors were reached, with demonstrated improvements in stress recognition, coping capacity and peer support among participants. In parallel, Hosn el Hal, established as an inter-agency initiative with the United Nations agency for Palestine refugees, the Norwegian Refugee Council, Save the Children and War Child Holland, provides a scalable multimedia resource to support teacher mental health and wellbeing across crisis-affected settings in Lebanon, Syria, Jordan and the State of Palestine. The initiative focuses on psychoeducation, self-care, peer support and reconnecting teachers with a sense of purpose in their work. Flexible thematic funding was essential to UNICEF's leadership of this coalition. Supporting frontline workers in the most difficult-to-reach locations requires a level of flexibility and responsiveness that earmarked funding streams cannot provide, and the ability to work across agency boundaries in more open and collaborative ways enabled the production of shared tools at wider reach and lower cost than any single organization could achieve independently.

Afghanistan

Laila Qaharzai (green hijab) is a social worker currently deployed to Khas Kunar Camp, where she supports children and teaches them to draw and paint in a child friendly space.



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Service delivery and infrastructure

Policy and workforce investment only become real for children when the infrastructure to deliver services exists, including the referral pathways, community platforms, safe spaces and coordination mechanisms that connect national systems to individual children and families.

In a number of countries, thematic resources contributed to expanding or consolidating the service infrastructure available to children and families. In **Suriname**, a 12-week non-formal life skills and mental health programme was developed in partnership with the Ministry of Youth Development and Sport, reaching approximately 900 adolescents through youth centres across five districts, with a standardized curriculum, facilitator manuals and a training-of-trainers package developed to underpin scale-up. Cross-cutting social and behaviour change interventions implemented alongside this work contributed to increased community dialogue, improved help-seeking behaviours and greater visibility of mental health services at community level. In **Cambodia**, the foundation built through thematic investment, including support to key personnel and the adaptation of materials to be inclusive of child and adolescent mental health, proved essential when a border crisis generated emergency mental health needs in late 2025, enabling the team to rapidly organize and coordinate the response in ways that would not have been possible without the pre-existing investment. In **Nicaragua**, a workshop with adolescents and young people generated co-created content on care practices and conflict resolution within the family, as part of the broader community component of the national mental health model. In **Mexico**, thematic funding enabled UNICEF and its partner La Jugarreta to move a well-established network of 78 Child Friendly Spaces toward a model owned and sustained by local institutions and communities, with 1,946 children on the move continuing to access psychosocial support through the transition. The full account of this experience is presented in the impact story below.

Two country experiences in particular illustrate what thematic investment in service delivery infrastructure produced in 2025 where conditions were in place for institutionalized, sustainable results. In **Belize**, perinatal mental health is now an institutionalized component of primary health care, with routine mental health screening embedded within the antenatal and postnatal services women already attend. Over 400 primary health care workers were trained and more than 10,000 women were screened using the Edinburgh Postnatal Depression Scale, with mothers who need support now identified early, offered first-line care and connected to specialist services where needed. Thematic funding enabled a scalable and sustainable model for integrating perinatal mental health into primary care that will continue to serve women and children beyond any individual funding

cycle, with documented reductions in stigma and improvements in maternal well-being. In **Equatorial Guinea**, UNICEF launched “En Mi Mente,” a mental health podcast co-created with 11 adolescent and youth co-creators and produced in local languages, Pichi and Fang, including two young people with visual disabilities who participated in all phases of the project. Funding implementation began in June 2025 with contextualization workshops, which was followed by recording, editing and the official launch on 10 October 2025 for World Mental Health Day. A nationwide promotional tour across both the continental and insular regions concluded in February 2026, directly reaching nearly 3,000 adolescents and young people through safe spaces for dialogue on mental health and wellbeing. The podcast was adopted by the Directorate General of Mental Health of the Ministry of Health as a community awareness tool, and the initiative generated extensive coverage across national television, radio, social media and institutional platforms.

Data, research, and evidence

Without data, the case for mental health investment rests on assertion rather than evidence. Without evidence, programmes cannot be held accountable or improved.

Across most low- and middle-income country contexts, robust, comparable data on the prevalence of mental health conditions, the reach and quality of services, and the outcomes of interventions remain critically limited. In 2025, thematic funding generated evidence that was directly actionable at the country level, feeding into policy decisions, service design and the case for sustained investment.

In a number of countries, thematic resources contributed to strengthening the evidence base for child and adolescent mental health programming and policy. In **Serbia**, technical assistance to the Institute of Public Health produced national and international mental health indicators, several already integrated into the national monitoring system, strengthening the infrastructure for evidence-informed policy-making and accountability. In **Albania**, thematic funding enabled the first global pilot of BLOOM, generating data on the feasibility, relevance and potential impact of this parent-child intervention that will directly inform decisions about its adaptation and scale-up across additional country contexts. Two country experiences further exemplify what investment in evidence generation made possible in 2025 in contexts where such evidence had been largely or entirely absent.

In **Cambodia**, the national mapping of child and adolescent mental health services, the first of its kind in the country, produced an integrated evidence base on the availability, coverage and quality of these services, directly informing targeted policy investment and the

design of social and behaviour change campaigns co-created with adolescents to reduce stigma and promote help-seeking. The adaptation of training curricula to better address the needs of children and adolescents was also grounded in findings from the mapping. Flexible thematic funding was identified as essential to sustaining the team's focus on elevating child and adolescent mental health as a national policy priority while simultaneously responding to emerging operational demands, including the coordination of emergency mental health support when a border crisis arose in late 2025.

In **Pakistan**, 2025 was a pivotal preparatory year for a major initiative to close some of the most significant data gaps on adolescent mental health in the country. In partnership with the Global Institute of Human Development, UNICEF finalized a culturally adapted Urdu version of the Measuring Mental Health Among Adolescents and Young People at the Population Level tool and pilot-tested it with 50 adolescents in Rawalpindi. Ten data collectors were trained and certified in research ethics, safeguarding, survey administration and referral protocols, 50 school clusters were identified and nominated by the District Education Department, and ethics approvals, District Education Authority endorsement and referral linkages with the Institute of Psychiatry at Rawalpindi Medical University were secured. The programme is now positioned to move directly into full population-level data collection without further preparatory delay. The same tool was also integrated into the Gilgit-Baltistan Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey, generating population-level mental health data in a context where such evidence has been largely absent and will directly inform future programming and investment decisions.

Social and behaviour change

Even the best-designed mental health service fails children who cannot or will not access it. Social norms, stigma and limited awareness of available support are among the most persistent barriers to care across development and humanitarian contexts alike.

In 2025, thematic funding supported social and behaviour change work that was notable both for its reach and the depth of young people's involvement in creating it. In **Suriname**, cross-cutting social and behaviour change interventions implemented across health, education and child protection platforms contributed to increased community dialogue, improved help-seeking behaviours and greater visibility of mental health services at community level. In **Serbia**, the nationwide "You are not bad, You're just feeling bad" campaign, co-developed with young people and formally endorsed by six government ministries, reached 1,046,874 individuals and generated 3,056,441 impressions across digital

and other channels, promoting self-care, family connectedness and help-seeking behaviours among young people. The campaign reflects a broader pattern in Serbia's approach to child and adolescent mental health, that social and behaviour change not as a standalone communication exercise but rather an integral component of a governance architecture that is owned and sustained by government. The campaign is being expanded to additional locations across the country, with government ministries sustaining its implementation as part of the broader child and adolescent mental health institutional framework established through the Office for Support to Children and Youth. In **Iraq**, UNICEF is developing awareness assets and messaging on mental health stigma, and preparing training for young community health coordinators on stigma reduction and MHPSS, positioning SBC as integral to, not separate from, the broader systems strengthening agenda.

Global coordination and inter-agency leadership

Effective mental health and psychosocial support in humanitarian settings depends not only on what individual organizations deliver, but on how well the broader system coordinates across agencies, across sectors, and across the gap between global guidance and country-level practice. UNICEF's co-leadership of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee Reference Group on Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in Emergency Settings reflects its commitment to sustaining that coordination architecture, not only as a participant but as a driver of its strategic direction.

In late 2025, the IASC Reference Group on Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in Emergency Settings, co-chaired by UNICEF and IFRC, consolidated its role as the principal inter-agency platform for humanitarian MHPSS coordination and defined its strategic direction for 2026. Building on member consultations and the Annual Meeting, the Reference Group established priorities to navigate the humanitarian reset and Community of Practice transition, strengthen support to country-level coordination mechanisms, reinforce coherence across thematic workstreams, enhance learning and information management, improve access to practical coordination resources, and ensure that country experience more directly informs global coordination. Thematic contributions have provided a critical lifeline for sustaining these core inter-agency functions and enabling the Reference Group to maintain coordinated support to humanitarian operations at a time of severe pressure on humanitarian funding and capacity.

5. Impact story

From disruption to resilience – sustaining psychosocial support for children on the move in Mexico

Mexico in 2025 illustrates, with particular clarity, what flexible thematic funding makes possible that no other funding modality can. For years, UNICEF and its implementing partner La Jugarreta had sustained a network of 78 Child Friendly Spaces across Mexico, providing daily psychosocial activities for children on the move alongside parenting and emotional wellbeing sessions for families and caregivers. This network was financed primarily through U.S. Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM) funding. When that funding ended abruptly, the risk was immediate as 1,946 children stood to lose psychosocial support overnight, and the institutional knowledge and community relationships built over years risked being lost with it.

Rather than allowing an abrupt closure, UNICEF Mexico activated flexible thematic resources to enable a deliberate and structured transition that needed sustained support to complete.

From service delivery to system ownership

Rather than UNICEF and La Jugarreta delivering services directly, the goal was to transfer knowledge, skills and ownership to the institutions and communities that would remain after the funding cycle ended. With thematic support, UNICEF and La Jugarreta engaged 20 partner institutions and transferred capacities to 189 university students, volunteers and staff from public institutions and local authorities. Peer-to-peer mentoring mechanisms were established, and an asynchronous virtual learning platform was developed to ensure the Child Friendly Spaces model could persist and expand through locally owned channels.

The result was that all 1,946 children continued to access psychosocial support through the transition. Knowledge and capacities are now embedded within institutions and communities rather than held by external implementing partners, maximizing the long-term sustainability of the investment.

The value of flexibility

What this transition required, which included engagement with 20 partner institutions, platform development, peer mentoring infrastructure, adaptive planning through a rapidly changing context, could not have been financed through earmarked funding tied to direct service delivery. It required the ability to redirect resources toward an outcome that was less visible in the short term but more durable over time.

“Rather than allowing the abrupt closure of PRM funding to interrupt support, these resources enabled a strategic transition toward institutionalization and sustainability, including peer-to-peer mentoring mechanisms and the development of an asynchronous virtual learning platform. As a result, knowledge and capacities are being embedded within institutions and communities, maximizing the long-term impact and sustainability of the investment.”

UNICEF Mexico Country Office

The Mexico case illustrates a principle that ran through thematic funding use in 2025 across multiple contexts, which is that the most durable mental health systems are those owned by communities and institutions, not those dependent on any single external funding stream. Thematic flexibility enabled UNICEF to use a moment of disruption as an opportunity to accelerate that transition and embed sustainability in its programme response.



Mexico

Adolescents at Conalep Morelia II, in Michoacán, take training in the “Yo apoyo a mis amigos y amigas” (I support my friends) programme.

5. Impact story

Strengthening Cambodia's mental health systems for young people

For Vin, a 27-year-old youth leader and advocate for women's leadership and LGBTQ+ rights, friends used to describe him as a "spark" – someone whose enthusiastic energy could be felt from miles away.

In 2024, that spark went out. Following the death of his mother, Vin withdrew from the community where he once felt he belonged and turned to harmful coping mechanisms, including drug use, to numb the pain. He stopped sleeping and eating well. He could not sleep for three consecutive days. Even though doctors told him that his physical health was fine, he felt emotionally unstable and worried that he might not be capable of continuing his job as a teacher. The advocacy work that once gave him a reason to wake up every morning felt far away.

The symptoms became physical. "I woke up one morning and looked at myself in the mirror," Vin recalls. "I saw myself covered in bones."

Despite struggling with both his mental and physical health, seeking help felt impossible and shameful. In Cambodia, the shadow of stigma still looms large. "I didn't know where to go," says Vin. "And I was afraid of being called crazy for going to a mental health hospital."

"I thought I was grieving my mother's death, but I was also grieving my own self being alive."

Vin, Youth Leader and Advocate, Cambodia

Realizing he could no longer fight alone, Vin reached out to TPO in Phnom Penh for professional support. Through a combination of medication and psychotherapy, and supportive friendships, he found something he had not had in months: a safe space, where he could be vulnerable in processing and expressing his emotions. His psychologist did more than treat his condition. She helped him process and express his emotions and feel heard. His friends also showed up and cared for him.

Since June 2024, the spark has returned. He has become more active in sharing his story to raise awareness and challenge the stigma surrounding mental health in Cambodia. By speaking openly about his journey, he has turned his experience into a source of courage and inspiration for young people, encouraging them to seek support and help break the stigma around mental health.

In March 2026, Vin was elected leader of the Non-Communicable Disease (NCD) advocacy committee, which is organized by Health Action Coordinating Committee (HACC) Cambodia, a network of local civil society organisations in the health sector. He now uses his lived experience to ensure other young people



Cambodia

At Wat Por 500 in Preah Vihear Province, a student reads Khmer text from the whiteboard. He is one of the children from displaced families attending a class held in a makeshift classroom under a tent. The temporary learning space was created by World Vision, with UNICEF Cambodia providing study materials and recreational supplies to support the children's learning and well-being during and after class.

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don't have to suffer in silence, believing that young people have the power to create change if they are confident enough to express themselves. His goal is to empower youth to speak openly about topics that are often stigmatized, such as mental health, HIV, and reproductive health. In the future, he hopes to establish his own NGO focused on youth education, awareness campaigns, and community health.

Bridging the Gap: UNICEF's Efforts to Build a Strong Mental Health System in Cambodia

Vin's struggle to find help is a reality for thousands of Cambodian young people. Global estimates suggest that around 1 in 7 adolescents aged 10–19 (15 per cent) experience a mental health condition. Among individuals who accessed public health facilities and received a psychiatric diagnosis in 2025, adolescents and young adults (ages 15–24) accounted for over 85 per cent of all cases (31,373). Anxiety and depression represented the most frequent diagnoses within this group.

To ensure no young person feels as lost as Vin did, UNICEF Cambodia and the Ministry of Health's (MoH) Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse (DMHSA) are transforming personal stories into systemic change. This work directly supported Cambodia's Mental Health Strategic Plan (2023–2032) through a rigorous, four-phase Child and Adolescent Mental Health (CAMH) Service Mapping. The process involved a consultation with 49 stakeholders from health, education, child protection, and other relevant sectors to identify the gaps and opportunities for mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) system strengthening. Most importantly, the mapping included direct consultations with 114 children and adolescents, including 90 adolescents aged 10–19 (55 females), 17 young adults aged 20–24 (9 females), and 7 children aged 4–9 (2 girls) across urban and remote areas in Phnom Penh, Siem Reap, and Ratanakiri province to understand the barriers of help seeking behaviours.

The assessment revealed key gaps and opportunities in the CAMH system, including the lack of community-based support systems and specialized mental health experts for young people, limited mental health awareness, and stigma that discourages help-seeking behaviours.

At the policy level, while Cambodia has foundational strategies like the Mental Health Strategic Plan IV, they lack actionable, cross-sectoral policy and operational guidance. Without collaborative guidance, mental health remains a siloed priority. CAMH service delivery is one of the biggest concerns from the community level to the clinical level.

Public CAMH services coverage is concentrated in five hospitals nationwide. With that coverage, there are only 0.62 psychiatrists per 100,000 population, a level similar to some ASEAN countries but below the global

average of 1.5 per 100,000. Thus, there are continued opportunities to expand the CAMH workforce through targeted training, task-sharing, capacity building, and supervision for health and social service providers across MHPSS systems.

Additionally, current CAMH coordination and referral pathway, current systems are fragmented. Health, education, and social welfare operate in isolation, lacking standardized referral pathways, which prevent children from receiving continuous, multi-disciplinary support. Despite growing interest, stigma and gender norms, particularly among boys, hinder help-seeking behaviours. Promoting youth-friendly services and peer-led networks is essential to shifting attitudes from self-reliance to proactive professional engagement.

With this key finding, UNICEF continues to support the government and partners with the implementation of mental health strategic plans. Supported by UNICEF's Mental Health Thematic Funding and other support, UNICEF has been conducting cascade training and on-site coaching to equip health staff, teachers, and village health support groups (VHSG) in Preah Vihear, Banteay Meanchey, and Oddor Meanchey provinces with skillsets and knowledge in psychosocial and mental health support, counseling, mental health screening, psychoeducation, and case referral to specialized care. In addition to building support systems in clinical and community settings, UNICEF has developed online content related to mental health to empower young people, parents, and caregivers to break mental health stigma, promote positive help-seeking behaviours, and ultimately improve mental health and wellbeing.



Cambodia

At Wat Por 500 in Preah Vihear Province, a group of students from displaced families attend a class held in a makeshift classroom under a tent.

6. Purpose in action: How private sector partners are shaping the future of mental health

A Coalition that goes beyond funding

In a year defined by humanitarian funding contraction and structural financing pressures, the sustained and growing commitment of private sector partners to UNICEF's Global Mental Health Thematic Fund carried particular significance. These partners did not step back when the operating environment became harder. They stepped forward with resources, platforms, innovation and advocacy at a moment when the children's mental health agenda needed them most.

Many of these organizations are members of the UNICEF-led Global Coalition for Youth Mental Health, a growing network of companies committed to raising awareness, reducing stigma and driving systemic change in youth mental health. In 2025, the Coalition expanded its reach and deepened the quality of its contributions across digital innovation, youth co-creation and advocacy. Private-sector partners bring complementary capabilities: speed, reach, creative capacity and the ability to engage young people on platforms and in languages that resonate.

What distinguishes the strongest of these partnerships is not the size of the financial contribution but the depth of engagement. The partners featured here share a conviction that mental health is a systemic challenge that requires investment in the conditions for change, not just in the visibility of the issue.

Spotlight: How Rituals and Spotify are helping reimagine mental health for the next generation

Rituals: Everyday rituals for inner balance

As a brand, Rituals is dedicated to personal wellbeing in the luxury beauty industry. Rituals' mission has always been to help people slow down and find meaning in the everyday.

In 2025, Rituals joined forces with UNICEF to champion one of the most urgent yet overlooked issues of our time: the mental health of children and young people. Through its 10 per cent Profit Pledge, Rituals supports UNICEF's Global Mental Health Fund. The Fund trains professionals, reduces stigma, and improves data on youth wellbeing. As part of this commitment, Rituals also joined the Global Coalition for Youth Mental Health to make child and youth mental health a priority on global agendas. By helping to reduce stigma, advocate for greater investment, and create supportive environments for young people across the world. The Coalition's aim is ambitious yet essential: to strengthen the mental health and resilience of 150 million children and young people in 150 countries by 2030.

For Rituals, the partnership reflects a shared belief with UNICEF: that mental wellbeing is fundamental to a full and healthy life, and that caring for children today builds the foundations of tomorrow.



Cambodia

At Wat Por 500 in Preah Vihear Province, children from displaced families enjoy recreational materials provided by UNICEF Cambodia in a makeshift classroom under a tent. The temporary learning space was established by World Vision, with UNICEF Cambodia supplying both educational and recreational resources to support the children's learning and well-being during and after class. These children are among those affected by the armed conflict along the border.

“The shocking numbers of how many young people are struggling with mental health issues, really struck a chord with me and I realised we wanted to do more as a company. In my vision of 21st century entrepreneurship, it is not just about growth and profit, but primarily about the impact we make. In today’s world, we believe it is more important than ever to stand together in partnerships like these that contribute to lasting positive change. As the future of children is our future we must support building their mental resilience. We are very proud to partner with UNICEF and are dedicated to help enhance the mental health and wellbeing for young people and communities worldwide.”

Raymond Cloosterman, Founder and CEO, Rituals

The podcast was first launched in Ukrainian, Polish and English in June 2023, in response to the urgent mental health needs of youth affected by the war in Ukraine. It was launched in eight countries in Latin America in 2024 and has since expanded to 11 languages across 31 countries, reaching young people in both emergency and non-emergency contexts. The English version is accessible worldwide.

“In an era marked by endless scrolling and overwhelming noise, Spotify is dedicated to enhancing well-being and fostering positive engagement. Through our collaboration with UNICEF and the Global Coalition for Youth Mental Health, we’ve created the On My Mind podcast, tailored specifically to support the mental health and holistic wellness of Gen Z.”

Katie Christiansen, Senior Director, Social Impact, Sustainability and Inclusion, Spotify

Spotify: Sound, storytelling and emotional wellbeing

In 2025, Spotify and UNICEF continued to turn up the volume on youth mental health. We expanded our award-winning partnership with a Youth Mental Health Audio Innovation Challenge across five countries: Côte d’Ivoire, Equatorial Guinea, São Tomé and Príncipe, Timor-Leste, and Zimbabwe.

This innovation challenge initiative is based on UNICEF-led research and empowers young people to co-create localized mental health audio content in the On My Mind podcast. By amplifying authentic youth voices, this next chapter sparks meaningful conversations, encourages self-reflection, reduces stigma, and brings mental health support closer to the young people who need it most.

Youth engagement drives every stage of the process, from content creation to community sharing. By integrating this content into local UNICEF programmes and partner platforms, from community radio to youth networks, the initiative ensures mental health resources reach young people wherever they are.

Each episode of the *On My Mind* podcast tackles themes that matter most to young people: breaking the stigma around mental health, managing anxiety, nurturing relationships, coping with stress, practicing self-care, and handling grief and loss.

An expanding ecosystem of partners

Beyond Rituals and Spotify, the Coalition in 2025 included contributions from Jo Malone London, lululemon, Pinterest, Sony Group Corporation and Z Zurich Foundation. Each brought distinct capabilities: lululemon’s investment enabled expanded community-based services and strengthened systems in crisis-affected and low-resource settings. Pinterest contributed a focus on digital and creative wellbeing, supporting youth mental health programming and advocacy through accessible, expressive tools that resonate with adolescents and help bridge the gap between intention and care. Z Zurich Foundation contributed sustained commitments to social investment, extending UNICEF’s reach into new institutional contexts.

Together, this ecosystem demonstrates what becomes possible when private sector purpose meets systemic ambition. The most valuable contributions are those that do not simply fund services but help build the conditions, including political, social, financial and cultural, under which durable mental health systems can take root. UNICEF invites more partners to join this mission. The need is structural and the opportunity is generational.



Global Coalition for Youth Mental Health
[Annual Report 2025](#)



Spotlight on the Global Mental Health Thematic Fund

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