



In Baja California, Mexico, UNICEF, with authorities and private sector partners, delivers food assistance and key information to families affected by the socio-economic impacts of COVID-19.

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Humanitarian Action for Children

Children on the move and COVID-19 in Mexico and Central America

HIGHLIGHTS

- Prior to the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, Mexico and countries in Central America¹ were facing significant humanitarian needs related to migration flows, violence, internal displacement, food insecurity and poverty. The pandemic could push 10 million additional people into poverty,² leaving millions of children dependent on humanitarian assistance.
- UNICEF will address the specific needs of at least 251,000 people in the context of human mobility in border areas/routes/transit points, in communities of origin and return, and at final destinations; while ensuring that the most vulnerable children, families and communities are protected from exposure to and the impacts of COVID-19.
- UNICEF is requesting US\$59.7 million to expand its support to children and families in the context of human mobility and address COVID-19-related humanitarian needs. Anticipated results include the safe return to school; nutritional support; and the provision of sanitation and hygiene services and supplies.

IN NEED

16.4 million
people³

6.8 million
children⁴

TO BE REACHED

2.8 million
people⁵

2.3 million
children⁶

KEY PLANNED TARGETS



183,400

primary caregivers
receiving infant and young
child feeding counselling



96,320

people reached with critical
water, sanitation and
hygiene supplies and
services



37,988

children/caregivers
accessing mental health
and psychosocial support



1.1 million

children accessing
educational services

FUNDING REQUIREMENTS

US\$ 59.7
million

HUMANITARIAN SITUATION AND NEEDS

In parts of Central America, forced recruitment, gang violence and crime are daily realities for children.⁷ These issues are often compounded by poverty and limited access to quality education.⁹

Irregular migration flows continue to affect the subregion, with thousands experiencing urgent needs, including 87,000 unaccompanied children and 446,000 family units apprehended/expelled at the southwestern border of the United States of America, between January 2019 and August 2020.¹⁰ Between 2018 and 2019, the number of apprehended families increased by 160 per cent.¹¹ In Mexico, refugee applications increased 20-fold between 2015 and 2019.¹² Over 470,000 people from northern Central America have sought asylum/refuge worldwide.¹³

Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, 5,000 children (60 per cent unaccompanied) have been returned to El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Mexico from the United States and Mexico.¹⁴ In Panama, there has been a six-fold increase in the number of extra-continental migrant children crossing the Darien Gap over the past two years, and 2,500 migrants were stranded at border sites due to COVID-19.¹⁵

The rights of migrant women and children to basic services, including shelter, water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH), food, protection, education and health care, are frequently violated in countries of origin, transit, destination and return. The policies adopted by some governments have also impacted children's access to safety and international protection.

As of August 2020, the countries included in this appeal have recorded 895,000 COVID-19 cases and 72,000 deaths.¹⁶ The existing socio-economic dynamics in these countries, including poverty, social and gender inequalities, violence, displacement, food insecurity,⁸ malnutrition¹⁷ and climate shocks,¹⁸ have increased vulnerability to the pandemic.

Children and families have been devastated by the humanitarian and socio-economic impacts of the pandemic, including the extended lockdowns, school closures, the cessation of essential economic activities, declining migrant remittances,¹⁹ and rising violence against children and women.²⁰ As economies contract, an additional 10 million people could fall into poverty²¹ and thousands of families will rely on humanitarian assistance to cover basic needs. More than 42 million students have been affected by school closures²² and substantial investment is needed to ensure the safe reopening and operation of schools.

Children affected by human mobility are at heightened risk due to the impacts of COVID-19, with limited or no access to safe water, sanitation and essential services. The crisis has also restricted access to international protection and regular migration pathways.

SECTOR NEEDS



Nutrition

100,000 children under 5 years with acute malnutrition²³



Education

4.4 million children need education support²⁴



Population displacement

560,000 internally displaced persons²⁵



Refugee and migrant population

215,000 refugees and asylum seekers in the subregion²⁶

STORY FROM THE FIELD



Janete, a 13-year-old Congolese girl, tells of her journey with her six cousins through the Darien Gap, one of the world's most dangerous migratory routes.

Janete dreamt of pizza in the middle of the world's most dangerous jungle.

"When I was in the jungle, I was very hungry. I still feel the pain of hunger. Not even eating ends it. I thought I was going to arrive at a city. I thought I was going to eat pizza and drink soda. But when I got here, there was nothing. It was a relief, but also a disappointment."

Janete is a survivor of the Darien Gap, an inhospitable place at the Colombia/Panama border that has seen a dramatic increase of migrants in transit.

[Read more about this story here](#)

HUMANITARIAN STRATEGY

UNICEF will respond to the needs of at least 251,000 people affected by human mobility in line with its Agenda for Action for Refugee and Migrant Children. Actions will be implemented to achieve the following strategic objectives, in coordination with humanitarian partners and governments: (1) promote and advocate for the rights of children and families; (2) ensure access to gender-sensitive services and protection for migrants, refugees and unaccompanied children (i.e., protection, gender-based violence, education, health, nutrition, safe water, sanitation and hygiene); and (3) promote social inclusion and integration through access to social services and humanitarian cash transfers; the regularization of children's and their families' legal status; strengthened social policies and national and local capacities; and strong linkages between humanitarian action and development programmes.

Actions will be delivered at strategic locations, including border areas/routes/transit points, communities of origin and return and final destinations. The needs of host communities will be taken into consideration in all interventions.

UNICEF's COVID-19 response will be guided by the Core Commitments for Children in Humanitarian Action and global guidance on COVID-19.²⁷ The response will focus on ensuring that 2.3 million vulnerable children and their families – including children affected by human mobility – are protected from exposure to and the impacts of COVID-19. This will include supporting a people-centred public health response for prevention, care and treatment (including supplies); strengthening and complementing government and partner efforts to maintain/restore/scale up essential services, including for health, nutrition, WASH, child protection, gender-based violence, early childhood development, education and social protection; establishing effective coordination and collaboration with United Nations agencies, governments and humanitarian partners; disseminating key information to reduce disease transmission and its impact; and making materials and services equally accessible for people with disabilities and available in local languages.

Given its long-term presence in the countries covered by this appeal, UNICEF will link its humanitarian action with development programmes aimed at strengthening policies and systems, including enhancing resilience.

UNICEF's Grand Bargain commitments²⁸ are mainstreamed across its strategies. For example, UNICEF will promote localization by strengthening government and local actors; reinforce mechanisms for accountability to affected populations; and boost the quality and impact of humanitarian cash transfers.

Robust emergency preparedness and response measures will also be established. UNICEF's strategy will be grounded in country-level response plans and adjusted over time to reflect the evolution of the pandemic and humanitarian needs.

2021 PROGRAMME TARGETS



Nutrition

- **183,400** primary caregivers of children aged 0 to 23 months receiving infant and young child feeding counselling
- **275,600** children aged 6 to 59 months screened for acute malnutrition²⁹



Health

- **506,000** children receiving the minimum set of vaccines³⁰
- **35,934** health workers reached with personal protective equipment



Water, sanitation and hygiene

- **66,398** people accessing a sufficient quantity of safe water for drinking, cooking and personal hygiene
- **116,400** children accessing appropriate water, sanitation and hygiene facilities and hygiene services in learning facilities and safe spaces
- **96,320** people reached with critical water, sanitation and hygiene supplies (including hygiene items) and services



Child protection, GBViE and PSEA³¹

- **37,988** children and caregivers accessing mental health and psychosocial support
- **84,958** women, girls and boys accessing gender-based violence risk mitigation, prevention or response interventions³²
- **14,620** unaccompanied and separated children reunified with their primary caregiver or provided with family-based care/alternative care services
- **49,625** children identified as in need of specialized services who are referred to health, social welfare and justice services



Education

- **1,119,030** children accessing formal or non-formal education, including early learning³³
- **197,100** children receiving learning materials
- **3,655** schools implementing safe school protocols (infection prevention and control)



Social protection and cash transfers

- **135,000** households reached with cash transfers through an existing government system where UNICEF provided technical assistance and funding³⁴



C4D, community engagement and AAP

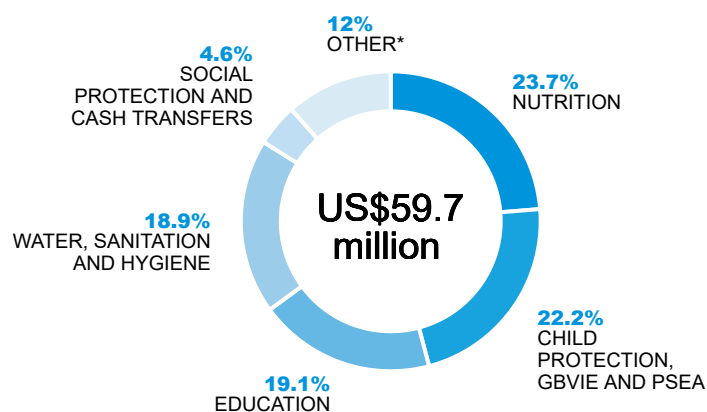
- **2,009,000** people reached with messages on access to services

FUNDING REQUIREMENTS IN 2021

UNICEF requests US\$59.7 million to meet the humanitarian and resilience needs of children and families in the context of human mobility and the COVID-19 response in Mexico and Central America. Thirty per cent of this requirement will be dedicated to scaling up support to children and families in the context of human mobility, including in response to COVID-19; and 70 per cent will address the COVID-19-related humanitarian needs of other affected populations.

This funding will enable UNICEF to maintain and expand programme capacities in the field through pre-existing and new partnerships. As UNICEF's strategy is strongly linked with its regular development programming, it will address the urgent needs of the most disadvantaged, while also contributing to building more resilient and shock-responsive systems. In addition to country-level requirements, a regional funding requirement is included to cover coordination and technical and quality assurance support for country offices.

In line with the Grand Bargain commitments, UNICEF is advocating for flexible and multi-year funding, which will be critical to ensuring a swift response to urgent needs, and helping UNICEF build more responsive programming, particularly in Mexico and Central America, where humanitarian needs are protracted and recurrent.



*This includes costs from other sectors/interventions : Regional office technical capacity (4.5%), Health (4.4%), C4D, community engagement and AAP (2.7%).

| Sectors | 2021 total requirement (US\$) |
|--------------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Nutrition | 14,144,979 |
| Health | 2,626,778 |
| Water, Sanitation and Hygiene | 11,284,095 |
| Education | 11,388,482 |
| Child protection, GBVIE and PSEA | 13,239,793 |
| Social protection and cash transfers | 2,730,460 |
| C4D, community engagement and AAP | 1,592,863 |
| Regional office technical capacity | 2,680,000 |
| Total | 59,687,450 |

| Sectors ³⁵ | Belize | Costa Rica | El Salvador | Guatemala | Honduras | Mexico | Panama | Regional Support | 2021 total requirement (US\$) |
|--|------------------|------------------|------------------|-------------------|------------------|-------------------|------------------|------------------|-------------------------------|
| Nutrition | 128,183 | 118,412 | 146,265 | 5,037,748 | 81,073 | 8,363,088 | 270,210 | - | 14,144,979 |
| Health | 58,167 | - | 1,644,220 | 803,896 | 120,495 | - | - | - | 2,626,778 |
| Water, Sanitation and Hygiene | 174,502 | 720,769 | 706,107 | 1,179,047 | 3,886,436 | 4,245,696 | 371,538 | - | 11,284,095 |
| Education | 261,752 | 1,915,187 | 524,537 | 1,991,518 | 2,020,339 | 4,292,352 | 382,797 | - | 11,388,482 |
| Child protection, GBVIE and PSEA ³⁶ | 835,884 | 1,024,522 | 1,351,690 | 5,200,670 | 1,363,039 | 3,047,415 | 416,573 | - | 13,239,793 |
| Social protection and cash transfers ³⁷ | 339,696 | 494,242 | 151,309 | 750,303 | 709,389 | 116,640 | 168,881 | - | 2,730,460 |
| CAD, community engagement and AAP | 161,575 | 411,868 | 100,872 | 787,818 | 130,730 | - | - | - | 1,592,863 |
| Regional office technical capacity ³⁸ | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 2,680,000 | 2,680,000 |
| Total | 1,959,759 | 4,685,000 | 4,625,000 | 15,751,000 | 8,311,501 | 20,065,191 | 1,609,999 | 2,680,000 | 59,687,450 |

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ENDNOTES

1. This appeal covers the following countries: Belize, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico and Panama. It covers the humanitarian needs of populations on the move in these countries, including those affected by COVID-19, as well as the COVID-19-related needs of the vulnerable non-migrant populations in these countries.
2. It has been projected that the number of people living in poverty in Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico and Panama, may grow by over 10 million in 2020, bringing the total number of people living in poverty from around 72 million in 2019 to over 82 million in 2020. Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, 'Addressing the Growing Impact of COVID-19 with a view to Reactivation with Equality: New projections', Special Report COVID-19 no. 5, ECLAC, 15 July 2020.
3. This includes 682,000 people in the context of human mobility. This is a UNICEF estimate based on country-level analysis and previous or preliminary inter-agency calculations.
4. This includes 192,000 children in the context of human mobility. This is a UNICEF estimate based on country-level analysis and previous or preliminary inter-agency calculations.
5. Ninety-one per cent of the total is people affected by the impacts of COVID-19; and 9 per cent is people affected by human mobility. The total includes 80,100 people to be reached in Belize; 67,250 in Costa Rica; 255,600 in El Salvador; 983,380 in Guatemala; 80,937 in Honduras; 1,231,000 in Mexico; and 65,661 in Panama. Women and girls represent 50 per cent of the total number of people to be reached. UNICEF is committed to needs-based targeting, which means covering the unmet needs of children; and will serve as the provider of last resort where it has cluster coordination responsibilities.
6. Six per cent of the total is children to be reached in the context of human mobility. The total was calculated using the highest coverage programme targets at the country level, adding up other children-specific targets, aiming to minimize potential double counting, as a child can be reached with one or more services. This includes 76,200 children to be reached in Belize; 53,076 in Costa Rica; 205,200 in El Salvador; 795,450 in Guatemala; 42,625 in Honduras; 1,044,000 in Mexico; and 52,660 in Panama.
7. Some of the world's most violent countries that are not engaged in active warfare are in Central America. According to the InSight Crime foundation, in 2017 there were homicide rates of 60 per 100,000 people in El Salvador; 42.8 per 100,000 in Honduras; 26.1 per 100,000 in Guatemala; and 22.5 per 100,000 in Mexico. Some children are forcibly recruited or join gangs in an attempt to protect themselves from violence. Thousands of children have dropped out of school to get away from gang threats and harassment. United Nations Children's Fund, 'Uprooted in Central America and Mexico: Migrant and refugee children face a vicious cycle of hardship and danger', UNICEF Child Alert, UNICEF, August 2018.
8. At least 2.8 million people, including 1.1 million children, are facing crisis/emergency levels of food insecurity in El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras. This is a UNICEF estimate based on Integrated Food Security Phase Classification reports on these countries from 2019 and 2020.
9. In some parts of northern Central America, school enrolment rates are very poor, particularly as children reach adolescence. In Honduras, for instance, just 46.7 per cent of adolescents aged 12 to 14 – and only 28.1 per cent of adolescents aged 15 to 17 – were in school in 2017. United Nations Children's Fund, 'Uprooted in Central America and Mexico: Migrant and refugee children face a vicious cycle of hardship and danger', UNICEF Child Alert, UNICEF, August 2018.
10. U.S. Customs and Border Protection Department of Homeland Security, 'Southwest Border Migration FY 2020', <www.cbp.gov/newsroom/stats/sw-border-migration>, accessed 14 October 2020.
11. Ibid.
12. Solís, D. V. 'La migración centroamericana y la Cuarta Transformación ¿hacia un nuevo paradigma de política migratoria? Movilidad humana en tránsito: retos de la Cuarta Transformación en política migratoria', March 2020.
13. United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 'North of Central America Situation', UNHCR, July 2020.
14. Estimated by UNICEF country offices based on data from national protection authorities.
15. United Nations Children's Fund, 'Panamá COVID-19 Situation Report No.2', UNICEF, 30 June 2020.
16. Johns Hopkins University Center for Systems Science and Engineering, 31 August 2020.
17. An estimated 16.6 million people are undernourished in Central America and Mexico. Food and Agriculture Organization, Pan American Health Organization, World Food Programme and United Nations Children's Fund, 'Regional Overview of Food Security and Nutrition in Latin America and the Caribbean 2021' (unpublished).
18. Between January and August 2020, over 557,000 people, including 206,000 children, were affected by mid-/large-scale disasters in these countries. Based on data from: UNICEF and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), and Centre for Research on the Epidemiology of Disasters, 'EM-DAT: The International Disaster Database', 6 September 2020.
19. Remittance flows to Latin America and the Caribbean are expected to decrease by 20 per cent in 2020. World Bank, 'COVID-19 Crisis Through a Migration Lens. Migration and Development Brief no. 32', World Bank, Washington, D.C., 2020.
20. United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, 'Strategies for the Prevention of Violence against Women in the Context of COVID-19 in Latin America and the Caribbean', UN Women, April 2020.
21. 'Addressing the Growing Impact of COVID-19 with a view to Reactivation with Equality: New projections'.
22. Estimated based on United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization Institute of Statistics data available at <<http://data.uis.unesco.org/#>> and local sources.
23. Pre-COVID-19 data. As the impact on the nutritional status of children is not immediate, the situation is expected to deteriorate. United Nations Children's Fund, World Health Organization and World Bank Group, 'UNICEF/WHO/The World Bank Group Joint Child Malnutrition Estimates: Levels and trends in child malnutrition - key findings of the 2020 edition', UNICEF, WHO and World Bank, March 2020.
24. Preliminary estimate based on national sources collected by United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Sistema de Información de Tendencias Educativas en América Latina, UNESCO Institute of Statistics and local sources. Estimating that around 88.3 per cent (average subregion enrolment rate) of the school-aged children in need in the subregion, will have education-specific needs.
25. This includes El Salvador (71,500), Guatemala (estimated 242,000) and Honduras (247,000). Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 'Panorama de las Necesidades Humanitarias El Salvador, Guatemala y Honduras 2020, Addendum: Impacto de la COVID-19', OCHA, May 2020.
26. United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Operational Portal Refugee Situations: Forced displacement in Central America and Mexico', UNHCR, <<https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/cam>>, accessed 18 September 2020.
27. World Health Organization, '2019 Novel Coronavirus (2019-nCoV): Strategic preparedness and response plan', WHO, April 2020.
28. The Grand Bargain is a unique agreement between some of the largest donors and humanitarian organizations, who have committed to getting more means into the hands of people in need and improving the effectiveness and efficiency of humanitarian action.
29. This includes Guatemala (275,000) and Panama (600). In Guatemala, UNICEF plans to support the treatment of at least 865 children with SAM and 5,227 children with moderate acute malnutrition.
30. This includes El Salvador (100,000), Guatemala (400,000) and Honduras (6,000). Depending on context, the minimum set of vaccines includes bacille Calmette-Guerin, diphtheria, tetanus and pertussis, polio and measles, with some countries adding additional vaccines, such as haemophilus influenza type B and hepatitis B, as related to their context.
31. Due to space constraints, the following acronyms appear in the appeal: GBViE (gender-based violence in emergencies); PSEA (prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse); C4D (communication for development); and AAP (accountability to affected populations).
32. This includes Belize (4,000), Costa Rica (5,000), El Salvador (2,000), Guatemala (60,000), Honduras (11,558), Mexico (2,000) and Panama (400).
33. This includes Costa Rica (39,000), El Salvador (330), Honduras (10,000), Mexico (1,020,000) and Panama (49,700).
34. This includes technical support to cash programmes in Guatemala (130,000 households) and Honduras (5,000 households). In addition, UNICEF will provide humanitarian cash transfers across sectors for vulnerable families in Costa Rica (2,300 households), El Salvador (1,000 households) and Panama (400 households).
35. Cross-sectoral costs (i.e., monitoring and evaluation, communications and others) are embedded in sectoral funding needs.
36. This includes US\$9 million for child protection and US\$4.2 million for gender, gender-based violence in emergencies interventions and prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse interventions.
37. This includes US\$750,000 for cash transfers in Costa Rica, El Salvador and Panama.
38. Regional Office requirements are spread across all multi-country appeals for the region (children on the move from the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, the regional appeal and this appeal). The Regional Office requirement in this appeal comprises technical assistance and coordination support (US\$880,000), preparedness and resilience efforts (US\$1,000,000) and response to a sudden deterioration of needs at the country level (US\$800,000).