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Vanuatu Earthquake Response

One year on

December 2025

BACKGROUND



On 17 December 2024, a 7.3-magnitude earthquake struck Vanuatu, affecting more than 80,000 people (40,000 children), damaging homes, schools and health facilities, disrupting essential services for children and families and deepening existing vulnerabilities.

Powerful tremors shook Vanuatu, toppling buildings and triggering landslides that blocked roads and isolated communities. Fourteen people were killed, and about 80 per cent of the population on Efate Island were affected, including more than 40,000 children. The 7.3-magnitude quake damaged schools, hospitals, and bridges, leaving thousands displaced and in urgent need of assistance.

From the first day of the emergency, UNICEF worked alongside the Government of Vanuatu and partners to address urgent needs. Within 24 hours, emergency relief began reaching affected communities and critical services, while assessments and coordinated response plans were initiated to guide wider response and recovery.

Over the past year, UNICEF has continued to support the Government and people of Vanuatu throughout the recovery process. Efforts have focused on restoring essential social services, strengthening systems and building resilience in communities facing multiple risks, including climate-related hazards and disease outbreaks. Together with government and civil society partners, UNICEF has helped more than 30,000 people to access water, sanitation and hygiene, education, health, nutrition and child protection services, and has reached over 100,000 people with social and behaviour change messages.

This report reflects the collective achievements made possible through strong collaboration with government counterparts, civil society and donors. It also highlights the stories of strength and determination from children, families and frontline workers who continue to adapt and rebuild in the face of adversity. As we mark one year since the earthquake, UNICEF reaffirms its commitment to supporting Vanuatu's recovery and resilience so every child can survive and thrive.

WATER, SANITATION AND HYGIENE

Clean water and emergency sanitation for families, schools and health facilities



Situation for children

The earthquake damaged pipelines, rainwater harvesting systems and sanitation facilities in communities, schools and health facilities. This heightened the risk of waterborne diseases for children, particularly in overcrowded evacuation sites, making rapid rehabilitation, hygiene promotion and sanitation support critical to prevent outbreaks.

Key achievements

- UNICEF and the Department of Water Resources co-led the Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH) Cluster, coordinating life-saving post-earthquake responses, recovery planning, assessments and monitoring so support reached communities and institutions most in need.
- Safe water supply was re-established for more than 20,000 people and essential services stabilised. Emergency water trucking began within 24 hours, prioritising Vanuatu Central Hospital, then expanded to the hardest-hit areas. Over 50 community water tanks added 250,000 litres of storage to support recovery and resilience for over 10,000 people.
- UNICEF distributed 1,500 hygiene kits and 5,000 water containers to support over 11,000 people and an estimated 5,000 health-facility users, meeting urgent hygiene needs and reducing disease risk in evacuation sites and host households.
- Hygiene messages reached over 15,000 people and menstrual health products were provided to over 6,000 women and girls, helping families adopt safer practices and maintain dignity while services were restored.
- UNICEF supplied WASH kits to 24 schools, installed rainwater tanks in 21 schools, and set up 40 portable latrine slabs in 8 schools and 10 health facilities, enabling 11,224 students and teachers to continue learning safely and allowing health clinics to operate.

Impact



20,916 people reached by emergency water trucking



11,000+ people supported with emergency supplies



6,029 women and girls received menstrual hygiene products



1,500 hygiene kits distributed



50 community water tanks installed



24 schools received WASH kits



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EDUCATION

Safe return to learning for children and teachers



Situation for children

The earthquake severely damaged 46 schools, disrupting learning for over 11,000 children who needed safe spaces and materials to resume classes. Temporary learning spaces, emergency supplies and rapid assessments were critical to ensure children could return to school safely.

Key achievements

- The Ministry of Education and Training ensured more than 11,000 children in 46 affected schools could resume learning at the start of the 2025 school year. UNICEF helped make this possible setting up 55 temporary learning spaces and distributing prepositioned education supplies to 3,388 children across 15 schools and 10 early childhood centres.
- UNICEF supported 9,173 parents and 262 teachers with mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) materials, strengthening their ability to recognise stress, promote positive coping and create safer, more reassuring environments for children.
- Reconstruction work began on six damaged classrooms to improve safety and resilience, supporting 210 children and seven teachers with safer learning environments.
- UNICEF co-led the Education Cluster with the Ministry of Education and Training, coordinating action and joint monitoring to support the safe reopening of schools.
- UNICEF supported policy and planning through technical support to the Government Investment Programme, fundraising for recovery activities, contingency planning at national, provincial and school levels, and launching the School-Based Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) Handbook to strengthen preparedness and resilience across the education system.

Impact



12,655 children affected by damaged schools



10,966 parents and teachers supported with MHPSS messaging



3,348 children reached with education in emergency supplies



55 temporary learning spaces established



46 affected schools resumed learning



6 classrooms under reconstruction



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HEALTH AND NUTRITION

Integrated outreach for immunisation and nutrition support



Situation for children

The earthquake damaged health facilities and disrupted life-saving services, limiting access to immunisation and nutrition support for children. Rapid assessments, integrated outreach and restoration of cold chain capacity were critical to protect child health and prevent malnutrition.

Key achievements

- The Ministry of Health, with UNICEF support, assessed 33 health facilities and conducted a rapid nutrition assessment in 12 affected communities, identifying damage, service gaps and emerging nutrition risks to guide targeted response and reconstruction.
- UNICEF is providing financial and technical support for the renovation of the temporary National Vaccine Storage Facility at Vila Central Hospital. Two of three buildings are complete, securing vaccine storage and strengthening continuity of immunisation services.
- From February to June 2025, the Shefa Provincial Health Office, with UNICEF and local partners, delivered 99 integrated health and nutrition outreach events in Efate and five nearby islands. These included 779 vaccine doses for children under five, malnutrition screening for 2,617 children, vitamin A, deworming and micronutrient powders, and key nutrition messages for caregivers.
- The Nutrition sub-cluster, co-led by the Ministry of Health and UNICEF, coordinated the response, including assessments and supply distribution, improving coverage and reducing duplication in affected communities.
- Three primary health facilities began offering outpatient Integrated Management of Acute Malnutrition (IMAM) services with UNICEF support, following training of six health workers. By June 2025, 21 children with severe acute malnutrition were enrolled for treatment.

Impact



2,617 under-five children screened for malnutrition



779 vaccine doses given to children under five



99 integrated outreach events delivered



33 health facilities assessed



21 children treated for severe acute malnutrition



6 health workers trained on IMAM services



CHILD PROTECTION

Safe spaces, psychosocial support and stronger protection services



Situation for children

The earthquake increased stress and protection risks for children and caregivers, especially in displaced and hard-to-reach communities. Children needed safe spaces, psychosocial support and stronger referral pathways to stay protected from violence, neglect, exploitation and abuse, and support their recovery.

Key achievements

- UNICEF co-led the Child Protection in Emergencies Sub-Cluster with the Ministry of Justice, Youth and Community Services and supported the National MHPSS Technical Working Group, strengthening coordination, rapid assessment, service mapping and referral pathways for children at risk.
- In the first weeks after the earthquake, six safe spaces for children were established in 13 communities, including outdoor areas for displaced populations, giving children structured opportunities to play, recover and access support.
- One-on-one and group counselling, case management and play-based psychosocial activities in safe spaces and evacuation centres reached 1,340 children, 567 women and 392 men, ensuring timely protection and referral support.
- To enhance service quality and sustainability, UNICEF trained 216 frontline workers, including teachers, counsellors, chaplains and child protection workers, on case management, counselling, peer support and supervision, improving the care children receive during and beyond the emergency.
- Key messages on MHPSS, child protection and prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse were shared via radio, social media, SMS, posters and school and evacuation-centre outreach, reaching over 35,000 people, including 11,000 students in schools.

Impact



35,000 people reached with messaging



1,340 children reached with services



959 women and men reached with services



216 frontline workers trained on MHPSS and child protection



13 communities hosting play-based activities



6 safe spaces established for children



SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR CHANGE AND ACCOUNTABILITY TO AFFECTED POPULATIONS

Clear information and community feedback shaped a safer, more trusted response



Situation for children

Emergencies heighten health, protection and well-being risks for children, women and people with disabilities. Clear, credible messages and functioning feedback channels were essential so families could make informed decisions and humanitarian actors could adapt support to people's needs and rights.

Key achievements

- UNICEF worked with the Ministry of Health, Ministry of Education and Training, National Disaster Management Office and civil society partners to strengthen community engagement and accountability, using U-Report polls and community outreach to gather feedback on access to clean water, health, mental health support and information channels.
- Cross-sector behaviour change messages were developed and harmonised across WASH, health and nutrition, education and child protection, translated into Bislama so families and frontline workers received clear, consistent guidance.
- Mass media campaigns delivered life-saving and recovery messages through radio, SMS and social media, helping communities adopt safer practices, counter misinformation and stay informed during response and early recovery.
- A back-to-school strategy and key messages were developed with the Ministry of Education and Training, informed by community feedback, to support children's safe and confident return to learning.
- Twelve youth ambassadors and social mobilisers were trained on accountability to affected populations and deployed in heavily impacted communities to register U-Reporters, share verified information and collect feedback to inform programme adjustments.

Impact



100,000 women and men reached through mass media



45,000 children reached with key behaviour change messages



3,000 people participated in U-Report polls



2,258 women and men shared feedback on services



308 children provided feedback through accountability to affected population activities



12 youth ambassadors and social mobilisers trained on Accountability to Affected Populations (AAP)

Hope Flows Again in Eratap Eluklang

When the earth shook on 17 December 2025, the small coastal community of Eratap Eluklang, Efate, was left reeling. Homes were cracked, gardens were ruined, and the single water source that sustained the community collapsed. For weeks, families in Eratap struggled not only with rebuilding their homes, but also with something more essential: finding clean, safe water to drink.

For Ronita, a mother of three originally from Malekula, the days that followed felt endless. “We used to rely on one hand pump for everything — to cook, to wash, to swim and to drink,” she said. “When it rained, the water would get dirty, but at least we had water. After the earthquake, things got worse. Our source of water was completely destroyed.”

Without a working water system, Ronita and her neighbours walked long distances in the heat to find any usable source – often unsafe rivers and muddy rainwater. “We asked for help everywhere,” she recalled. “We did not know what to do.”

That help finally came when UNICEF, working with the Government of Vanuatu, arrived in Eratap Eluklang. Engineers assessed the damage and soon began installing a new, resilient water system – one that could withstand harsh conditions and continue providing safe water even during storms.

UNICEF’s response was part of a broader emergency relief effort across Efate and other affected islands. The team prioritised communities like Eratap Eluklang, where families were most at risk of disease due to

contaminated water. Within weeks, a new large water tank stood proudly in the centre of the community, connected to a gravity-fed system that delivers clean, drinkable water without the need for manual pumping.

Ronita could hardly believe the transformation. “I am so thankful that our prayers have been answered,” she said, smiling as her four-year-old girl filled her bottle nearby. “UNICEF gave us a new big water tank and a water system in place. It is a better system. We don’t need to pump the water anymore, and when it rains, we still have access to clean and drinkable water.”

The benefits quickly rippled beyond Eratap Eluklang. Families from nearby communities now come to collect water from Ronita’s village when they struggle with water. “This new system does not benefit us only,” she said proudly. “People from the community nearby come to get water here too when they need it.”

As the sun sets over the palm trees of Eratap Eluklang, the steady flow from the community tap is more than just water; it’s a symbol of hope, resilience, and community strength.

“We are going to look after our water system,” Ronita promised. “To make sure we continue to have access to clean and drinkable water, and to make sure we can support other people when they need it too.”

In Eratap Eluklang, *the water now flows again.*



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MOVING FORWARD

Resilient recovery

UNICEF will continue to seek funding for climate- and disaster-resilient rehabilitation of schools, health facilities and community infrastructure, as well as ongoing recovery activities, ensuring children have safe, reliable services in the long term.

Preparedness and disaster risk reduction

Preparedness will be strengthened through expanded training for national and local partners, improved contingency planning and stronger coordination across clusters and multisectoral working groups.

Expanded services

Integrated health and nutrition outreach, IMAM treatment and multisectoral psychosocial support will be scaled up to additional provinces to improve equitable access and strengthen service continuity beyond earthquake-affected areas.

Stronger social protection systems

The Multidimensional Child Poverty Assessment will be completed in early 2026 to guide child-sensitive social protection design. UNICEF will continue supporting government engagement, advocating for a designated lead ministry and strengthening capacity for data, policy and shock-responsive systems.

CHALLENGES & OPPORTUNITIES

Concentrated urban impact and workforce pressure

The rapid-onset impact of the earthquake in Port Vila and surrounding areas created a high concentration of needs,

requiring intensive assessments and coordination in the first weeks. Limited workforce availability, particularly outside Port Vila, placed additional pressure on essential services and highlighted the value of continued capacity strengthening.

Coordination and feedback systems

Strengthening multisectoral coordination remained a priority as national and provincial systems worked to align information, referrals and service delivery. Because community feedback systems were not fully established before the earthquake, partners relied on alternative mechanisms such as U-Report to gather community input and adapt programming.

Social protection and humanitarian cash transfers

A rapid feasibility assessment found that humanitarian cash transfers could not be implemented at scale due to capacity and system limitations. However, it identified clear entry points for strengthening shock-responsive and child-sensitive social protection, which informed the development of the Multidimensional Child Poverty Assessment.

Funding constraints

Funding constraints affected the overall response, with global humanitarian cuts limiting the scale of activities despite rapid funding mobilisation in the initial phase. Sustained and flexible funding will be critical to consolidate recovery gains and invest in more resilient systems for children.



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Government of Vanuatu partners

Department of Water Resources
Ministry of Education and Training
Ministry of Health
Ministry of Justice, Youth and Community Services
National Disaster Management Office
Prime Minister's Office
Shefa Provincial Health Office

Donors

Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade
Embassy of Austria
European Union
Pacific Regional Education Framework
UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office
UNICEF Luxembourg
United Nations Central Emergency Response Fund

Implementing partners

ADRA Vanuatu
Oceania Football Confederation Just Play Programme
Vanuatu Family Health Association
Vanuatu Football Federation
Vanuatu Red Cross Society
Wan Smol Bag
World Vision Vanuatu
Youth Challenge Vanuatu



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