

CYCLONE DITWAH

5 December 2025


 unicef

for every child

සෑම දරුවෙක් වෙනුවෙන්ම

ஒவ்வொரு சிறுவர்களுக்காகவும்



On 2 December 2025, workers at the Palliyawatha warehouse in Wattala store and move calcium hypochlorite bottles, preparing them for dispatch to Colombo's flood-affected areas to clean contaminated buildings and destroy harmful germs.

SITUATION IN NUMBERS¹



462,274

Children Affected²

1,844,055

People Affected



341 People missing



486 Deaths



1,231 Safety

Centres



171,778

People in Safety
centres

Highlights

- Cyclone Ditwah made landfall on 28 November, causing severe floods and landslides across Sri Lanka. Over 1.8 million people, including 462,000 children, are affected. Widespread damage to water systems, health facilities, and over 1,185 schools has disrupted essential services, putting children at risk of disease, malnutrition, and prolonged learning loss.
- There is an urgent need for safe drinking water, sanitation and hygiene supplies, as well as access to child protection, health, nutrition, and education services to protect vulnerable children and their families.
- UNICEF is providing life-saving assistance by delivering emergency WASH supplies, including water bottles and water purification tables, operating child-friendly spaces, offering psychosocial support, and providing food assistance to children under five and pregnant and breastfeeding women. Further life-saving support is being scaled up to reach more children and families in the coming days and weeks.
- UNICEF urgently requires US\$7.8 million to provide immediate, life-saving support to children and families affected by the floods.

Situation Overview & Humanitarian Needs³

Cyclone Ditwah made landfall on the East coast of Sri Lanka in the early morning of 28 November 2025, causing widespread floods and deadly landslides across the nation. By 5 December, over 1.8 million people, including over 462,000 children, were affected across 25 districts, with 486 deaths and 341 missing people. Over 171,000 people remain in 1,231 government-run centers, with many more reported to be staying with host families.

¹ Disaster Management Center, Situation Report on 5 December 2025, at 6:00 hours

² The number of children affected is estimated based on the census data of children below the age of 18 in the disaster affected districts.

³ Based on secondary data, pre-disaster information, and expert inputs, the Disaster Management Centre and partners released a Joint Rapid Needs Assessment on 2 December, providing a preliminary snapshot of impacts on populations, infrastructure, and essential services. Sectoral needs are summarized here and more information can be found in that assessment: https://www.dmc.gov.lk/images/pdfs/Rapid_Needs_Assessment.pdf

Despite major infrastructure challenges, with some roads still inaccessible, clearance operations have reopened key routes, improving access for relief teams and restoring connectivity between priority districts.

WASH

Water supply is severely disrupted nationwide, leaving many communities without safe drinking water and increasing disease risk. Over 687 major urban schemes and 235,875 household connections (14 per cent of household connections nationwide) are damaged, with the highest impacts in Sabaragamuwa, Eastern, Uva, and Central Provinces. In Badulla, Kandy, Puttalam, Kegalle, and Nuwara Eliya, around 50 to 75 per cent of the water supply is interrupted. Rural systems and dug wells are inundated, causing contamination. Repairs are delayed by submerged infrastructure and power outages. Bottled water demand is high, but supply is limited due to flooded plants. Damaged sanitation facilities and insufficient sanitation facilities in temporary shelters lead to risk of disease spread and water contamination. Most of the sewer treatment plants are non-functional, and immediate water provision faces access, power, and resource constraints.

Child Protection

Displacement and overcrowded shelters have heightened risks of abuse, neglect, and family separation. Children lack safe spaces and psychosocial support, while loss of documentation undermines access to services. Institutional care facilities have been affected, with relocations across several provinces. Mental distress is widespread - over 80 per cent of surveyed children reported psychological impacts, and nearly all displaced children showed fear and need for support. Reduced workforce capacity and disrupted referral pathways further constrain protection services, increasing vulnerability to exploitation and harmful coping strategies.

Nutrition and Health

Nutrition vulnerabilities are rising due to disrupted food supply chains and loss of regular diet intake, especially for under-five children, pregnant and lactating women, and persons with disabilities. Health service delivery remains disrupted across all 25 districts, with hospitals and primary care units damaged or inaccessible. Evacuations of critically ill patients have occurred. Maternal, newborn, and sexual and reproductive health services are severely affected, putting pregnant women and newborns at risk of complications.

Education

School and preschool infrastructure has been severely damaged or converted into shelters, disrupting the resumption of learning nationwide. The Ministry of Education has called for schools that are able to reopen, to do so on 16 December. However, public examinations remain postponed. Over 1,185 schools across all nine provinces are located in flood-affected areas, affecting the learning of over half a million children. The trauma experienced by children and education personnel because of the disaster, the damage to schools and households, loss of school learning materials, and the risk of prolonged closures increase the risk of lost learning and dropout, especially for children with disabilities and learning difficulties.

Summary Analysis of Programme Response

WASH

- UNICEF has rapidly scaled up its WASH response. At the request of local authorities, UNICEF has delivered over 2,000 units of 1.5 and 5-litre water bottles to child development and safety centres in Kandy (Central Province), Badulla (Uva Province), and Ampara (Eastern Province). Another 10,000 bottles of drinking water are being procured for Muthur, Eastern Province.
- Additional relief supplies are procured for distribution in Mannar, Kandy, and Batticaloa include 5,000 soaps, 2,400 buckets, 1,000 units of 500 ml hand sanitizer, 500 hygiene kits, 4,000 sleeping mats, 4,000 bed sheets, 4,000 towels, 8,000 toothbrushes, 1,600 tubes of toothpaste, 3,000 sanitary napkin packets, 350 packs of baby diapers, and 700 large garbage bins.
- UNICEF has procured 1,000,000 water purification tablets from its Supply Division in Copenhagen. The distribution to the most affected populations started on 4 December in all the districts. To support the

effective use of the tables, a guidance leaflet was prepared in collaboration with the Epidemiology Unit of the Ministry of Health in both local languages (Sinhala and Tamil).

- UNICEF also procured 24,100 kg of chlorine for water purification in community-based water supply schemes and distributions have started. 2,000 units of 1 kg laundry detergent packs and 1,000 units of 10-litre jerry cans for distribution in Mahawilachchiya have also been procured.
- Together with the Ministry of Health, UNICEF has developed and printed communication materials on using the water purification tablets targeting the affected communities.
- The Ministry of Housing, Construction and Water Supply and UNICEF convened two WASH Sector meetings since the landfall of the cyclone to coordinate the emergency response among partners.

Child Protection

- Within 48 hours of the onset of the displacement, MHPSS messages guiding parents and their children were disseminated in English, Sinhala, and Tamil through UNICEF's website and social media.
- UNICEF, with its CSO partners, is supporting government-led efforts by operating child-friendly spaces for displaced children and families, delivering on-site and remote MHPSS services, and ensuring protection for children evacuated from institutional care due to flooding.
- UNICEF has delivered 200 play and learning materials kits for children in safety centers across North-Western, Central and Eastern provinces.
- UNICEF trained 27 volunteers on psychological first aid, structured mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) activities for children and on protection from sexual exploitation and abuse (PSEA). These volunteers will be mobilized in safe centers in Colombo, Western province.
- UNICEF supported the Department of Probation and Childcare Services (DPCCS) in providing child protection services, including psychosocial support, and transportation for the DPCCS staff.
- UNICEF also supported the Ministry of Women and Child Affairs in planning the assessment of the child protection needs of affected children and families.
- UNICEF, in partnership with UNFPA, continues to actively coordinate among protection actors.

Nutrition

- UNICEF is supporting food assistance to vulnerable population groups across 14 districts, with 200 children with SAM to be supported with a food basket, 2,500 children under five years and 1,000 pregnant and breastfeeding mothers with dry rations, 6,000 vulnerable families and 1,000 pregnant and breastfeeding mothers with cooked meals.
- UNICEF has developed and disseminated key messages on the importance of breastfeeding and Infant and Young Child Feeding during emergencies to help keep children healthy.
- UNICEF has prepositioned Ready-to-Use Therapeutic Food (RUTF) to ensure timely treatment of children with severe acute malnutrition (SAM).
- UNICEF is leading Nutrition sub-Sector coordination in response to the emergency, bringing together UN and NGO partners, Ministry of Health nutrition focal points, the Nutrition Division, and the Family Health Bureau.

Health

- In response to a request from the Ministry of Health, UNICEF is supporting the procurement of 50,000 kg of Tropical Chloride of Lime (TCL) and over 4,500-liter cans of Cresol and Soap, which are essential for cleaning surfaces affected by the flooding.
- UNICEF procured 1,600 mosquito coil packets for Kandy district and 2,650 mosquito nets, including baby mosquito nets, for Badulla, Mannar, and Mahawilachchiya districts, to protect against mosquito-borne diseases.
- The Family Health Bureau of the Ministry of Health has begun assessing damage affecting the delivery of maternal, child health, and nutrition services. Findings will guide response efforts.

Education

- UNICEF procured 100 school cleaning kits to accelerate school reopening and is procuring individual supply kits for the most affected students.
- UNICEF, in collaboration with the Ministry of Education, has developed messages for students on accessing existing digital learning content to support continuity of learning. UNICEF is also working with

the Ministry to explore digital platforms for children in safety centres and those whose schools cannot reopen immediately.

- UNICEF is supporting the Ministry of Education in its assessment efforts to gather more detailed information of the impact on specific schools, students and teachers.
- UNICEF and Save the Children activated the Education Cluster and are closely coordinating with the Ministry of Education authorities.

Social Protection

- UNICEF is working with other UN agencies to support the government to identify affected children, pregnant and lactating women, and to identify entry points to support improving the coverage of the affected population through different social protection schemes, particularly the nutritional food package for pregnant and lactating women.
- UNICEF is exploring options to complement the Government's cash response with a "PLUS" approach – adding critical services and support such as nutrition counselling, child protection referrals, and information on health and education, to ensure that cash assistance is linked to broader well-being for children and families.

Social Behaviour Change (SBC), Accountability to Affected Populations (AAP) and Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA)

- UNICEF is communicating key life-saving information targeting the affected communities, including parents, using UNICEF's social media platforms and other channels.
- UNICEF's SBC unit is supporting all sections to improve community participation and supporting the adoption of positive and protective behaviours.
- UNICEF is training volunteers and new implementing partners on PSEA.
- PSEA posters have been developed and printed in Sinhala and Tamil and will be displayed in safety centres and community centres shortly. Each poster includes the name and contact details of the designated focal point for reporting.
- UNICEF is discussing support to the Government to strengthen AAP.
- UNICEF has reactivated the AAP Working Group, which brings together UN agencies, NGOs, INGOs, and other partners.

Funding Requirement

- UNICEF urgently requires US\$7.8 million to deliver immediate, life-saving assistance to children and families affected by the floods. This funding requirement may be adjusted as assessments are finalized and program plans evolve.

Humanitarian Leadership, Coordination and Strategy

UNICEF Sri Lanka is coordinating closely with the Government, national authorities, and international and local CSO and NGO partners to assess the situation and provide life-saving support.

The Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) has been re-activated,⁴ with UNICEF leading the response in WASH, Nutrition, Education and Child Protection. Regular sector meetings are taking place to ensure joint assessments and coordinated response planning and implementation.

A costed humanitarian Joint Response Plan (JRP) is under development and will be released on Thursday, 11 December.

⁴ For more information on the Humanitarian coordination, please see Flash Updates [1](#), [2](#), [3](#) and [4](#) of the United Nations Sri Lanka, Office of the Resident Coordinator.

Human Interest Stories and External Media

[UNICEF is deeply concerned by the devastation being caused by Cyclone Ditwah as it makes landfall](#)
[UNICEF Representative in Sri Lanka, Emma Brigham speaks to **Al Jazeera**](#)

[The scale of the devastation caused by **#CycloneDitwah** in Sri Lanka is enormous and concerning, UNICEF Representative Emma Brigham told **ABC Australia**.](#)

[The damage from **#CycloneDitwah** is colossal. Immediate needs of children are clean drinking water, nutrition, safety for those displaced, UNICEF spokesperson @Bismarck Swangin told **ABC Australia**](#)

[Despite severe access constraints since the onset of **#CycloneDitwah** early on 28 November, UNICEF managed to deliver some portable water to 25 safety centers hosting displaced families](#)

[Nifal Alawdeen, a UNICEF Programme Officer, arrived at a safety centre in Mutur](#)

[UNICEF Sri Lanka teams worked round the clock to pack play and learning materials](#)

[දිව්වා සුළි කුණාටුව අපේ දරුවන්ට බලපා ඇත්තේ කෙසේද? මේ ව්‍යසනයෙන් පසුව ඇති අභියෝගය මොනවද?](#)

[Today, UNICEF-supported emergency supplies were handed over to the **#Badulla** District Secretary](#)

[Initial estimates indicate that more than 275,000 children are among the 1.4 million people impacted](#)

[At the request of the Department of National Community Water Supply, UNICEF has delivered nearly 25,000 kilograms of chlorine for water purification](#)

[Sugath Adikaram, a UNICEF Programme Officer, is on the ground assessing the impact of **#CycloneDitwah**](#)

[Thurairtnam Sarmili, UNICEF Child Protection Officer currently in Jaffna in Sri Lanka's Northern Province](#)

Next Update: 9 December 2025

WHO TO CONTACT FOR FURTHER INFORMATION:

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

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

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

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