

Office of Emergency Prog.

Update on the context and trends

In 2023, far too many children were exposed to humanitarian crises in which their rights to survival, protection, health care, education and clean water were ignored, or even targeted. Natural disasters and climate emergencies often compounded the difficult conditions. Children were experiencing a world increasingly hostile to their rights, especially the 1 in 5 children globally living in or fleeing from conflict zones.

The number of people requiring humanitarian assistance reached an estimated 364.6 million globally in 2023, up from 324 million in 2022. The UNICEF Humanitarian Action for Children appeal estimated more than 200 million children in need of humanitarian assistance at the beginning of 2023 in countries with appeals. Conflict, global climate change and economic challenges caused the majority of humanitarian needs children and their families experienced throughout the year.

The assault on the rights of children living through complex crises and forgotten emergencies affected the lives and childhoods of children living strangled by war in the Gaza Strip, State of Palestine and under the spectre of violence in Israel; in the gang-filled streets of Haiti; in the cities and rural areas of the Sudan; in numerous provinces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo; under missile-filled skies in Ukraine. It impacted children on the move in the Darién Gap bordering Panama and Colombia; those living in the cyclone-drenched hills and valleys of Malawi; internally displaced due to conflict in Myanmar; or under siege-like conditions in areas of northern Mali.

Grave violations against children were all too common. Every kind of grave violation was present in Israel and the State of Palestine in 2023, where a brazen disregard for children's lives saw children indiscriminately killed or taken as hostages in early October; and nearly the entirety of the 2.2 million population of the Gaza Strip displaced in the midst of the ensuing retaliation and escalation of hostilities. By 31 December, at least 22,185 Palestinians had been killed in the Gaza Strip, an estimated 70 per cent of them women and children. Violence obliterated all children had: homes and safety, health care, education. Hundreds of thousands have been brought to the edge of starvation. Extreme threats to lives and childhoods also occurred elsewhere. In the Sudan, where conflict erupted in April 2023, 3.5 million children were forced to flee their homes. Millions were also displaced in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, where the number of grave violations against children surged in the first half of 2023 by 41 per cent. And in Haiti, 3 million children required humanitarian assistance, with children among those most vulnerable to heightened violence, including killings, kidnappings and sexual assaults by armed groups.

There was no shortage of climate-related humanitarian needs in 2023: storms (Tropical Cyclone Freddy in southern Africa, Storm Daniel in Libya, Cyclone Mocha in Myanmar); wildfires in Europe; drought (millions of people still facing high levels of water scarcity, for example in Madagascar and Somalia); and flooding (in Cameroon, the Niger, Nigeria, among other places). More frequent and more severe weather-related events, along with the global rise in temperatures, worsened conditions for children living in complex conflict situations.

In early February 2023, major earthquakes impacted 15.6 million people (including 1.8 million refugees) and more than 5 million children in Türkiye; along with 8.8 million people, including 3.3 million children, in the Syrian Arab Republic. Devastating earthquakes also affected Morocco in September and Afghanistan in October.

The number of cholera cases reported in 2023 surpassed those reported in 2022, reaching 766,300 in 31 countries by the end of the year, with more than 5,400 deaths. Ongoing humanitarian emergencies, climate change and suboptimal water and sanitation infrastructure gave cholera a foothold. And the number of measles cases in Europe and Central Asia skyrocketed – by December 2023, cases were up 3,000 per cent compared with the end of 2022.

Rising food prices linked to the war in Ukraine and global political and economic instability diminished the ability of the most vulnerable families to pay for necessities. These economic challenges overlapped with conflict, infectious diseases and other disasters.

As the United Nations agency with the mandate to safeguard the rights of all children, everywhere, UNICEF will continue to speak out publicly, advocate privately and act responsibly and swiftly with its partners to ensure provision of life-saving assistance to children. And we will do everything possible to ensure the extreme conditions of millions of children today are never, ever considered ‘normal’ or acceptable.

In this context, the Office of Emergency Programmes (EMOPS) provided strategic and coordinated support to UNICEF country offices preparing for and responding to humanitarian crises, in accordance with UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2022–2025 and the Core Commitments for Children in Humanitarian Action.

EMOPS leads efforts to ensure that UNICEF’s role in any emergency situation – complex, protracted or sudden-onset – is clearly defined, that the organization is well equipped to fulfil that role and deliver on our mandate at all levels.

Major contributions and drivers of results

In a dynamic environment characterized by the intensifying humanitarian needs of children in a complex and highly challenging environment, the UNICEF Office of Emergency Programmes (EMOPS) was able to provide significant field support to staff in all critical areas of its work, while at the same time carrying out responsibilities in cluster coordination and maintaining key security functions that are a foundation for safe humanitarian operations worldwide. Its Office Management Plan (OMP) sought to combine swift action in the face of to the rapidly evolving needs of children while at the same time continuing ongoing organization improvements and investments – including those linked to recommendations made by the Humanitarian Review – designed to enhance UNICEF’s ability to respond to the crises of the future.

EMOPS played a crucial role in ensuring equitable, effective, timely, and high-quality humanitarian responses in the field by providing effective leadership, coordination and secretariat functions for 10 Level 3 crises. Additionally, EMOPS provided support and coordination for 14 Level 2 crises, addressing bottlenecks and resource gaps in such areas as human resources, supplies and funding. One of EMOPS’ main achievements was effectively managing Level 3 Secretariats, offering crucial support to Global Emergency Coordinator to enhance coordination structures and mobilize organization-wide assistance for country offices as they scaled up responses. EMOPS customized coordination and support packages crisis by crisis, ensuring tailored and context-specific assistance to country offices.

In 2023, 568 staff deployments in support of humanitarian response were made from internal and external surge structures. Internal staff surge mechanisms provided support to 34 countries: 21 Emergency Response Team members spent 86 per cent of their working time on 65 deployments; and another 323 staff members undertook 366 deployments. Through external surge mechanisms, 137 deployments provided support through standby partner mechanisms, 36 through the Rapid Response Team and 17 through other external mechanisms, bringing expertise to 40 country, regional and

headquarters offices. UNICEF deployed dedicated gender capacity to every Level 2 and Level 3 response.

The UNICEF humanitarian response in 2023 would not have been possible without a high level of preparedness. In 2023, EMOPS continued to drive the organization's emergency response preparedness capacity. The UNICEF Procedure on Emergency Preparedness was revamped, with an updates to the Minimum Preparedness Standards and more harmony between the roles of headquarters and regional offices. The draft procedure is now ready for broad validation to ensure alignment with other UNICEF policies and processes. And, building on lessons from the COVID-19 response and from the rollout of the Emergency Preparedness Platform 2.0, UNICEF advanced development of EPP 3.0, simplifying it and integrating it with other internal system to lessen burden on users and to ensure internal coherence. And financial resources for preparedness flowing to the countries and regions including \$9.9 million in preparedness funding through the First Action Initiative and the Co-Funding Initiative, to supported 41 country offices. This was more than double the \$4.26 million allocated in 2022.

Forty-four country offices/crises responses received support from EMOPS on risk analysis and preparedness, including remote and in-person simulations in 10 country offices. EMOPS also provided technical support to regional offices and country offices in Level 3/Level 2 emergencies to develop risk/conflict analyses and contingency plans. Collaboration with the Division of Data, Analytics, Planning and Monitoring (DAPM) resulted in development of two key tools in UNICEF's geospatial infrastructure, to help meet the soaring demand for geospatial services over the last three years: GeoRepo, an open-source geospatial data repository that seeks to help ensure data interoperability across UNICEF and GeoSight, a platform that makes geospatial data, mapping and analysis open with ease for non-technical UNICEF staff. Innovations such as GeoSight, an open-source analytical platform, have revolutionized emergency planning and decision-making processes. However, ensuring widespread accessibility and utilization of such tools, especially in conflict settings and climate crises, presents ongoing challenges. Collaboration with government partners underscores UNICEF's commitment to evidence-based decision-making and data-driven approaches to emergency preparedness and risk-informed programming.

A crown jewel of the UNICEF geospatial ecosystem is the Child Climate Risk Index – Disaster Risk Model (CCRI-DRM), developed in collaboration with Programme Group and DAPM. The CCRI-DRM brings country offices and governments together to develop risk maps combining hazard exposure and child vulnerability. This enhanced the use of geospatial data for risk analysis and preparedness at the country office level.

UNICEF finalized an anticipatory action framework in August 2023. It will help to ensure a coherent and systematic approach to institutionalizing and scaling up anticipatory action. UNICEF is currently implementing anticipatory action in 13 countries and is developing projects in another 7 countries.

The Humanitarian Leadership Workshop 2023 series showcased enhancements in tools and approaches, notably integrating AGORA as an enrollment platform and Teams for webinars, improving learning content aggregation via its Learning Management System. Altogether, 100 senior managers were trained through the Humanitarian Leadership Workshop; the webinar series and flash coaching/mentoring sessions significantly contributed to course success. Other capacity development advances included revision of a 30-module UNICEF Emergency Preparedness and Response course, which helps to make existing ecosystem of emergency learning more coherent and focused. UNICEF also set up a humanitarian learning channel providing access to more than 200 certified humanitarian-related courses. Additionally, staff in 70 country offices were trained on the Emergency Procedures for Level 1, 2 and 3 crises.

With humanitarian access denied or under threat in multiple complex environments in 2023, EMOPS

provided essential support on humanitarian access and policy to numerous country offices. Country offices receiving specific support from UNICEF headquarters to address access issues included Afghanistan, Burkina Faso, Colombia/Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ecuador, Ethiopia, Haiti, Lebanon, Mali, Myanmar, Mozambique, Somalia, State of Palestine, the Sudan, the Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen. Short-term access support was deployed to Haiti, Ecuador, Ethiopia and Yemen, and access Emergency Response Team members deployed in support of northwestern Syria, the Sudan and Myanmar. And in November 2023, UNICEF piloted (with the Civil Military Coordination Service of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs) two dedicated trainings for staff on United Nations-civil-military coordination. UNICEF also continues to provide tailor-made sessions to its front-line staff, including security and emergency staff globally, on use of armed escorts, sanctions and principled humanitarian action and addressing bureaucratic administrative impediments.

Critical access interventions made possible by the intentional focus on developing the access knowledge and skills of staff included advocating for access to children in the Gaza Strip, in partnership with other organizations, and advocating to open the Rafah border crossing in October 2023. In Haiti, UNICEF took a leading role in negotiating access with armed non-state actors, spearheading inter-agency efforts in key areas of the capital Port-au-Prince. In October 2023, these efforts resulted in the rescue of dozens of children trapped amid crossfire.

EMOPS significantly bolstered UNICEF's global advocacy efforts for protecting children affected by armed conflict, influencing Security Council reporting requirements and strengthening the children and armed conflict agenda through participation in key conferences and workshops. EMOPS also played a crucial role in guiding UNICEF's engagement on protecting education and increasing its influence at the Security Council and General Assembly, resulting in strengthened language on child protection in resolutions and statements.

With the support of EMOPS, UNICEF made significant progress in implementing a comprehensive approach to localization in various countries. EMOPS developed guidance on capacity sharing arrangements and created a localization dashboard for reporting, facilitating the evaluation of UNICEF's localization approach, and coordinating sector-specific guidance on the humanitarian-development nexus. EMOPS also promoted the initiative launched in late 2022, 'Provision of Overheads to Local and National Partners', offering recommendations to enhance policy and practices for ensuring access to overhead funding by local and national partners. This led to policy changes within UNICEF, which now extends overheads to national and local non-governmental implementing partners.

Throughout 2023, EMOPS teams provided tailored support to enhance accountability to affected populations in emergency responses and major crises in 47 countries. Specialists in AAP placed in six regions also provided support. A digital AAP strategy and roadmap were developed in 2023 and are expected to strengthen feedback mechanisms.

UNICEF has started the development of the UNICARE project, a corporate digital solution for Complaints, Feedback, and Response Mechanisms (CFRMs) across UNICEF offices and partner organizations. This initiative, a collaboration of the EMOPS, ICTD, DAPM, Safeguarding and CSS teams, will result in innovative digital solutions and foster partnerships with key stakeholders to strengthen community engagement and accountability. Moving forward into 2024, the focus will remain on designing, developing and testing corporate CFRM solutions under the UNICARE project and piloting them in select countries.

The UNICEF Office of Emergency Programmes is a critical player in leveraging the work of other humanitarian actors to uphold the rights of children in humanitarian crises.

This is done partly through facilitation of key global partnerships. In 2023, EMOPS was instrumental in strengthening key UNICEF strategic partnerships at all levels. For example, the partnership between UNICEF and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) strengthened significantly when the organizations signed a new global Strategic Collaboration Framework in February 2023. With a goal of global coverage of this framework by 2025, its operationalization was achieved in Belarus, the Central African Republic, Pakistan, United Republic of Tanzania and Tunisia by December 2023.

The partnership between UNICEF and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) continued through its Strengthening Initiative, with consultations held in country and regional offices and in headquarters. Aligning with localization commitments from the Grand Bargain and World Humanitarian Summit, this initiative engaged Red Cross/Red Crescent National Societies and UNICEF country offices in six countries, resulting in the allocation of small grants in Honduras, Kyrgyzstan, Nigeria and Tajikistan.

The other way EMOPS leverages UNICEF resources to expand results for children is through crucial support to the UNICEF cluster coordination role. UNICEF is a leader or co-leader of the education, WASH and nutrition clusters and a leader of the child protection areas of responsibility. EMOPS contributed abundant cluster and inter-cluster staff at technical and managerial level to finalize and roll out the latest version of the interagency Joint Intersectoral Analysis Framework (JIAF 2.0), which was broadly viewed as successful and is perceived by field staff as an improvement over the previous system.

EMOPS also made good progress in implementing the Management Response to the CLARE II evaluation of UNICEF's role as cluster lead or co-lead agency. There was particular progress on policy and guidance areas: EMOPS developed Cluster Transition Guidance; updated 2015 guidance to country offices on cluster coordination; and developed guidance to address, in cluster coordination, policy commitments of accountability to affected populations, localization, centrality of protection, humanitarian and development nexus, gender-based violence risk mitigation and disability inclusion. During the year, UNICEF also allocated \$7.5 million in global humanitarian thematic funding to Level 2 and Level 3 countries with critical staffing gaps in coordination and information management to meet UNICEF commitments to reliable cluster leadership.

Several new tools (one for cluster coordination teams and one for local women's organizations) made humanitarian coordination more accessible and relevant for local women's organizations. And in 2023, 2,736 learners in 288 cities worldwide utilized UNICEF's Humanitarian Coordination Learning Channel on the Agora platform, completing 5,440 modules. Additionally, the EMOPS global cluster coordination section convened a UNICEF cross-cutting working group on localization, accountability to affected populations, gender-based violence risk mitigation and disability inclusion to work develop review criteria to mainstream these issues into humanitarian needs overviews (HNO) and humanitarian response plans (HRP). These criteria were used to review the 2022 HNOs/HRPs and will inform consolidated guidance for the 2024 Humanitarian Programme Cycle.

A 2023 mid-term review identified that the Global Nutrition Cluster is on track to achieve the targets identified in its 2022–2025 strategy, with two key strategic thematic shifts identified – localization and climate crisis. As such, EMOPS efforts will ensure 'localization where possible and international where necessary', approached through a climate-considered lens. In 2023, the Global Nutrition Cluster provided coordination and technical support for cluster and sectoral coordination mechanisms at all levels in 55 countries.

The Global Education Cluster brought in strong results in 2023 across core functions, including robust support to country clusters and working groups on coordination, information management, needs assessment and thematic priorities; strengthened learning and skills strengthening opportunities;

improved availability of data through enhanced needs assessments; and reinforced partnerships and advocacy. In 2023, the Global Education cluster provided 887 days of remote support through in-person and remote deployments through the UNICEF and Save the Children co-led Global Education Cluster's Rapid Response Team. In addition, 173 cluster coordination staff and partners were trained in foundational coordination and information management skills at the global and country level. The global education cluster also bolstered support to countries for needs assessment, including in collaboration with the Global Child Protection Area of Responsibility.

In 2023, the Global Wash Cluster's key achievements covered such areas as global strategic leadership, operational support, capacity and learning and knowledge management and advocacy. Among these were hosting high-level events at the UN Water Conference, Aidex and COP 28, promoting a "new way of working" that fosters partnership and increases collaboration across humanitarian, development and peace actors. The Global WASH Cluster has also increased its engagement in key work streams to support the roll out of Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) policies on humanitarian coordination with the Global Cluster Coordination Group (GCCG) as a priority this year. Enhanced efforts on advocacy efforts through the development and launch of strategies and products to showcase the importance of coordination of the humanitarian WASH sector in crises settings, supporting more than 10 countries, particularly Level 3 and Level 2 emergencies. This was supported by capacity and learning opportunities on advocacy as part of advocacy strategic workshops conducted and advocacy working groups supported.

Through the Global, Arabic, French and Spanish Help Desks, The Global Child Protection Area of Responsibility handled a total of 575 requests (167 more than in 2022) from child protection coordination teams, national and international partners, and interagency networks, across 42 countries. Through rapid response deployment, the Global Child Protection Area of Responsibility supported 399 days of surge deployment covering child protection information management and coordination as well as technical thematic support to 23 contexts.

The Global Child Protection Area of responsibility also finalized its Learning and Development Strategy (2023-2026), which help strengthen coordination and information management capacities for humanitarian coordination and response at country-level.

In 2023, EMOPS continued to strengthen and implement changes to UNICEF humanitarian action, as recommended by the Humanitarian Review, to ensure that UNICEF is prepared to respond in a timely, predictable and equitable way with quality programming to crises today and to the emergencies of tomorrow. As of December 2023, 16 recommendations had been completed and 46 were under way.

EMOPS supported the United Nations and UNICEF Security Management System to further empower security decision makers and security advisers to enable UNICEF to achieve results for children within acceptable levels of risk. Increased capacity building aimed at reaching decision makers and advisers throughout the United Nations Security Management System (UNSMS) as well as EMOPS' Office of Security Coordination's (OSC) oversight and matrix management of the UNICEF Security workforce, and advice to security decision makers and senior managers, directly or through Regional Security Advisers, ensured the effective implementation of security policy.

During 2023, OSC played a pivotal role in disseminating the revised Hostage Risk Management policy to the UNSMS. This was achieved through training 70 UNSMS professionals, enhancing their proficiency in applying proportionate response as the fundamental approach in handling the majority of hostage incidents within the UNSMS that involve extortion demands made by hostage takers.

EMOPS collaborated closely with Supply Division to improve the quality and efficiency of the procurement of security equipment. New Long-Term Agreements, including updated technical specifications, were put in place for Armored Vehicles and Ballistic Personal Protective Equipment.

Improved collaboration on procurement priorities also enabled more flexible support to High and Very High-risk countries to enable UNICEF activities in these areas.

EMOPS coordinated the development of the 2023 Humanitarian Action for Children Appeal. At its launch in December 2022, the appeal called for \$10.26 billion, but by the end of 2023 the total requirement had risen to \$11.1 billion. In the latter half of 2023, EMOPS coordinated the development of the 2024 Humanitarian Action for Children appeal, which was launched in December 2023 and requested \$9.3 billion for humanitarian response in 2024.

Lessons Learned and Innovations

UNICEF continues to innovate where possible and imagine a better future for children – and a better way to support them in the crises they face today. Examples of this (covered above) are progress in digital engagement for accountability to affected populations; advances in risk analysis (GeoRepo and GeoSight); the UNICEF led / co-led clusters and CP AoR joint initiatives e.g., roll-out of the inter-agency toolkit on localisation in humanitarian coordination, and the HLW Impact Evaluation which provided additional evidence that building humanitarian leadership benefits from a multi-faceted and comprehensive approach comprising coaching, peer-to-peer mentoring, alumni engagement, support to implement leadership action plans, and cross-divisional collaboration to ensure that learning results in increased agility to recruit skilled managers to humanitarian crises.

Evaluative exercises, among other tools, have provided lessons learned and indicated pathways forward. For example, EMOPS supported After Action Reviews and Strategic Moments of Reflections for State of Palestine, the Türkiye earthquake and United Republic Tanzania outbreak preparedness. These informed immediate corrective actions for ongoing responses in those places as well as organizational learning to apply more broadly and to future responses.

The findings of the Humanitarian Leadership Workshop Impact Evaluation provided additional evidence that building humanitarian leadership benefits from a multi-faceted and comprehensive approach comprising coaching, peer-to-peer mentoring, alumni engagement, support to implement leadership action plans, and cross-divisional collaboration to ensure that learning results in increased agility to recruit skilled managers to humanitarian crises. In 2023, the EMOPS Humanitarian Evidence and Learning Section (HELs) continued to innovate and build a more comprehensive and collaborative approach to the Humanitarian Leadership Workshop based on these lessons learned.

Building on COVID-19 and lessons learned from the Emergency Preparedness Platform (EPP) 2.0 rollouts, UNICEF is progressing well on the work to create EPP 3.0, bringing simplification and integration with other internal systems, with an intent to lessen the burden on users and ensure a better internal coherence.

More broadly, UNICEF is carrying out a mid-term assessment of the Humanitarian Review, coinciding with the mid-term review of the UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2022–2025. EMOPS expects to spearhead application of insights and any course corrections from the mid-term review of the Humanitarian Review.

The implementation of the Humanitarian Review encountered challenges and delays attributed to its expansive programming scope and operational areas, exacerbated by competing emergency priorities.

Additionally, financial constraints, particularly for recommendations requiring substantial investment, have further impeded progress. UNICEF acknowledges these challenges and has initiated a midterm assessment of the Humanitarian to adapt to emerging humanitarian trends, outline priorities for the remaining implementation period, and critically evaluate the structure, considering funding constraints that have delayed specific recommendations.

