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### United Nations Children's Fund

Executive Board

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### Annual report on UNICEF humanitarian action

#### *Summary*

Around 235 million people globally required humanitarian assistance in 2021. For children, this alarming reality meant being malnourished, missing school, lacking clean water to drink or adequate facilities for hygiene and living at risk of violence. The coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic caused some of these harms and exacerbated existing challenges.

This report presents an overview of how UNICEF responded to save lives and help emergency-affected children and families to realize their rights in 2021. It describes key challenges and how UNICEF plans to apply the lessons learned to the future humanitarian response.

Elements of a draft decision for consideration by the Executive Board are presented in section X.

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\* [E/ICEF/2022/9](#).

*Note:* The present document was processed in its entirety by UNICEF.



## I. Overview

1. A record number of people globally – 235 million – required humanitarian assistance in 2021, a number that is expected to rise to 274 million in 2022.<sup>1</sup> Millions of children and families needed humanitarian support to have adequate nutrition, access preventive health care and recover from illness and injury, enjoy an education, cope with displacement and remain safe from the harms and the worst effects of conflict and climate change.

2. The coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic created massive additional humanitarian pressure and made assisting emergency-affected people much more difficult.

3. UNICEF drew on the full force of its mandate and a dynamic network of partners to provide a protective and life-saving response – and to strengthen countries' resilience and preparedness and the underlying systems that can provide individuals and societies with the tools to withstand such shocks in the future. The organization responded in 153 countries to 483 new or ongoing humanitarian crises, including five Level 3 crises and seven Level 2 crises. Altogether, UNICEF responded to 104 natural disasters, 84 socio-political crises, 226 health emergencies (including the COVID-19 pandemic response), 27 nutrition crises and 42 other critical situations.

4. With its partners, including Governments, UNICEF provided an array of services and support for children and families in humanitarian crises in 2021:

- (a) Clean water and sanitation for 41.7 million people;
- (b) Measles vaccinations for 22 million children aged 6 months to 15 years old;
- (c) Treatment of severe acute malnutrition for 5 million children;
- (d) Access to education for 38.1 million children (50 per cent girls), including 6.4 million children on the move (48 per cent girls);
- (e) Mental health and psychosocial support services to 12 million children and families and interventions designed to prevent gender-based violence and support survivors to 13.9 million children and women;
- (f) Humanitarian cash assistance for 19 million children in 9.4 million households;
- (g) Procurement and delivery of 958 million COVID-19 vaccine doses and 845.7 million injection devices as a partner in the Access to COVID-19 Tools Accelerator (ACT-A);
- (h) Leadership or co-leadership of the nutrition, education and water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) humanitarian clusters and the Child Protection Area of Responsibility.

5. These results for children were made possible by the \$2.96 billion in humanitarian funding UNICEF received in 2021.

6. Additionally, UNICEF advocated at all levels of Government and in the international arena, providing advice to inform policies and to shape critical General Assembly, Security Council and Economic and Social Council resolutions to keep children's interests front and centre.

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<sup>1</sup> United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, *Global Humanitarian Needs Overview 2022*, New York, 2 December 2021, p. 9.

7. Work to strengthen key strategic partnerships (for example, with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the International Committee of the Red Cross, intensified. In 2021, UNICEF increasingly involved the private sector as a humanitarian partner. And the percentage of UNICEF humanitarian funding that went to local or national partners reached 29.3 per cent.

8. Notable challenges to achieving humanitarian results during the entire Strategic Plan, 2018–2021 period are enumerated in section VII of this report. The obstacles encountered in 2021 included continued difficulties with humanitarian access (despite some progress) and the ongoing impact of the pandemic on the scale of needs and on UNICEF operations.

## II. The humanitarian situation in 2021

9. Prolonged and violent conflicts remained the primary drivers of the humanitarian needs of children and families in 2021. Disease also caused extensive suffering. And climate change, a driver of population movement and displacements,<sup>2</sup> has also become one of the root causes of famine.<sup>3</sup>

10. A record high number of people – 283 million people in 80 countries – were acutely food insecure or at high risk of being food insecure in 2021.<sup>4</sup> Children were hungry and lacked adequate nutrition, with severe malnutrition causing wasting in 45.5 million children, more than 50 per cent of them living in South Asia. Children were thirsty and lacked clean water and adequate sanitation facilities. Some 23 million children worldwide missed out on the routine childhood immunizations that keep preventable diseases at bay. School closures caused by the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted children’s education, with 870 million students at all education levels facing disruptions in their learning in September 2021.

11. Prolonged and violent conflict escalated in Afghanistan, Ethiopia and Myanmar. Conflict also drove increasing humanitarian needs in the central Sahel (Burkina Faso, Mali and the Niger), Cabo Delgado Province in Mozambique, South Sudan, the Sudan, the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela and Yemen.

12. The United Nations verified 26,425 grave violations against children in 2020, the latest year for which complete data are available. During the first three quarters of 2021, verified cases of abduction of children had risen by 39 per cent compared with the same period in 2020, and verified cases of sexual violence against children had risen by 15 per cent.<sup>5</sup>

13. At the end of 2020, 82.4 million people worldwide (42 per cent of them children), or around 1 per cent of the world’s population, were displaced. Children who are displaced or on the move experience discrimination and xenophobia and are routinely denied essential services. Of the people currently displaced, the highest levels of displacement across national borders have occurred from the Syrian Arab Republic, the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela and Afghanistan (in that order); the highest levels of internal displacement exist in Colombia, the Syrian Arab Republic and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (in that order).<sup>6</sup> In many places around

<sup>2</sup> United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, *Global Trends: Forced displacement in 2020*, UNHCR, 2021, p. 9.

<sup>3</sup> United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, *Global Humanitarian Needs Overview 2022*, New York, 2 December 2021, p. 5.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 26.

<sup>5</sup> Information verified by the United Nations in situations of armed conflict, covered by the report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict, A/75/873-S/2021/437, United Nations, New York, 6 May 2021.

<sup>6</sup> Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, *Global Trends 2020: Forced Displacement in 2020*, Copenhagen, 2021, pp. 18 and 24.

the world, border closures and restrictions dramatically worsened the situation for people seeking protection and safety.

14. The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated existing deprivations and added many more linked to breaks in service provision and increased protection risks stemming from isolation, mitigation measures and economic hardships. Low- and middle-income countries have experienced the brunt of inequitable access to vaccines and COVID-19 therapeutics. At the end of February 2022, more than 100 countries were off track for meeting the target of vaccinating 70 per cent of their population with the COVID-19 vaccine by mid-2022.<sup>7</sup>

15. In short, millions of children were not able to fully enjoy their rights as recognized in the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocols. This is a child rights emergency. And its effects – displacement, hunger, illness, missed education and lack of protection from violence – are anything but abstract.

### **III. UNICEF global humanitarian response in 2021**

#### **A. Saving lives and helping children to realize their rights in countries around the world**

16. During 2021, UNICEF and its partners responded to a total of 483 new or ongoing humanitarian crises in 153 countries, compared with 455 crises in 153 countries in 2020. The depth of need of children and families in 2021 called forth an extraordinary effort from UNICEF staff, who worked alongside many local, national and international partners to provide assistance so that children living in even the most challenging circumstances could enjoy their rights to protection, education, health care and a clean environment.

17. In 2021, responses supported by UNICEF included five Level 3 emergencies: Afghanistan, northern Ethiopia, the Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen, as well as the global COVID-19 pandemic. UNICEF and partners also responded to Level 2 emergencies in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Haiti, southern Madagascar, Mozambique (the Cabo Delgado crisis), Myanmar, the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela and the central Sahel region.

18. To support country teams, global emergency response teams carried out 61 missions in 2021, including 2 remote and 3 hybrid (in-person and remote) missions, providing 3,475 days of support. UNICEF also deployed standby partners on 165 missions, including 130 standby personnel and 35 rapid response team missions that provided assistance in 55 country, regional and headquarters offices. These standby partner deployments provided 22,222 days of work. Humanitarian responses in Afghanistan, Ethiopia, Haiti, Myanmar, the Sudan and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela received the highest number of standby partner deployments.

19. In some places, insecurity and limited humanitarian access hampered the movement of humanitarian personnel and endangered their safety. UNICEF continued to enable activities in such contexts by using a comprehensive security risk management process consistent with the United Nations Security Management System and the security benchmarks outlined in the revised Core Commitments for Children in Humanitarian Action.

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<sup>7</sup> Our World in Data, available at: [https://ourworldindata.org/grapher/covid-vaccination-global-projections?country=-OWID\\_WRL](https://ourworldindata.org/grapher/covid-vaccination-global-projections?country=-OWID_WRL), accessed 26 February 2022.

20. UNICEF made significant gains in emergency preparedness in 2021, rolling out revised emergency preparedness procedures and allocating more than \$4.4 million in funding to 19 country offices.

21. Procurement for emergencies reached \$687.4 million globally, with 96 per cent going to Level 2 and Level 3 emergencies (including the COVID-19 pandemic). Supplies were provided to 149 countries and territories for preparing for or responding to emergencies. The largest component of emergency supplies was medical supplies and equipment, valued at \$399 million (this does not include the value of vaccines/biologicals). Supply Division also provided direct support through 11 emergency deployments to emergency locations including the Central African Republic, Haiti, Somalia, the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela and Yemen.

22. In addition, in its role within the COVID-19 Vaccine Global Access (COVAX) Facility, UNICEF delivered 958 million COVID-19 vaccine doses to 144 countries and 845.7 million injection devices. UNICEF also procured 800 ultra-cold chain units that can store 200 million messenger RNA vaccines, which require -80°C refrigeration, for more than 70 countries.

23. Humanitarian action continued to make up the primary expense of UNICEF in the field. A total of \$3.60 billion was spent on humanitarian action in 2021, or 57 per cent of all expenses. The country offices with the highest overall humanitarian expenses (in descending order) were Yemen, Lebanon, Turkey, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Ethiopia. In the Syrian Arab Republic, Turkey and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, more than 95 per cent of country-level expenses were classified as humanitarian expenses.

## **B. Influencing policies and perspectives for a better tomorrow**

24. UNICEF exerted the full force of its mandate to raise awareness of key issues affecting children and move policies in their favour. For example, through advocacy and close work between headquarters and the Afghanistan Country Office, UNICEF influenced passage of Security Council resolution 2615 (2021), which helps to ensure that children and families in Afghanistan can continue to benefit from urgently needed humanitarian assistance and other activities. UNICEF also successfully influenced Security Council resolution 2601 (2021), the first resolution designed to protect education from attack. This resolution was adopted with strong language on children with disabilities, girls' access to education, humanitarian access and the need to provide assistance that enables displaced children and refugee children to continue their education.

25. As a thought leader on work to address gender-based violence in emergencies, UNICEF continued its partnership with the Harvard Humanitarian Initiative to study the effectiveness of risk-mitigation efforts in this area, and completed the first-ever country study on the cost of inaction on gender-based violence in emergencies. Efforts to invest in and support local organizations, especially women's organizations, on issues of gender-based violence in emergencies continued in 2021. UNICEF helped to fund a report collating the experiences of 200 local women's organizations in 40 countries during the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>8</sup> The Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) gender-based violence Area of Responsibility help desk, which UNICEF funds and manages, responded to 127 queries from organizations during the year.

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<sup>8</sup> VOICE, We must do better: A feminist's assessment of the humanitarian aid system's support of women- and girl-led organizations during the COVID-19 pandemic, 2021.

26. The global UNICEF humanitarian response in 2021 was delivered in line with the UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2018–2021 and the revised UNICEF global policy and framework for humanitarian action, the Core Commitments for Children in Humanitarian Action. The country-level response to the COVID-19 pandemic was integrated into country and regional office strategies and appeals. UNICEF global efforts in support of COVID-19 vaccines, diagnostics, therapeutics and the health systems connector were guided by ACT-A.

27. UNICEF also began implementing the recommendations of the Humanitarian Review, the change management tool for transforming the organization's humanitarian response. Details on the progress of this implementation were provided to the Executive Board during its first regular session in February 2022.

### **C. Embracing and expanding a locally driven humanitarian response**

28. UNICEF has moved to meet its commitments to empower local responders in humanitarian crises in a variety of ways. The revised Core Commitments made investing in strengthening the capacities of local actors in the humanitarian response a mandatory benchmark for UNICEF action. UNICEF contributed to the work of the IASC on localization and helped to develop IASC guidance on strengthening the participation of local actors in humanitarian coordination mechanisms. UNICEF is also in the process of drafting a corporate strategy on localization and developed a humanitarian learning framework that, among other things, will drive a number of learning modules designed for national partner staff in their first language.

29. A more localized humanitarian response is a United Nations system-wide ambition. By the end of 2021, more than 20,000 civil society organizations, three quarters of them local and national actors, had registered on the United Nations Partner Portal, up from 15,000 in 2020. UNICEF continued to promote the use of the portal for the fair and transparent selection of partners, including local partners. In 2021, 433 first-time local or national civil society organization partners worked with UNICEF.

30. The proportion of humanitarian funding awarded by UNICEF to local and national civil society partners increased from 28.4 per cent in 2020 to 29.3 per cent in 2021, exceeding the Grand Bargain target of 25 per cent. Eight per cent of UNICEF humanitarian funding awarded to local or national partners went to women-led organizations<sup>9</sup> in 2021; of all local and national partners awarded humanitarian funding, 12 per cent were women-led. The collection of these data is new and will enable deeper analysis and identification of ways to meaningfully engage women-led organizations.

31. As in 2020, more than half of UNICEF country offices awarded at least 25 per cent of their humanitarian funding to local and national civil society partners. Countries with large-scale and notably localized humanitarian responses in 2021 included Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Brazil, Cameroon, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ghana, Haiti, Turkey, India, Indonesia, Iraq, Mali, Mongolia, Somalia and Ukraine.

32. A more localized response will improve humanitarian action and is fundamental to achieving better accountability to affected populations. On an organizational level, UNICEF made significant strides in furthering such accountability in 2021, placing technical specialists in four regions. A total of 47 country offices received dedicated

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<sup>9</sup>The United Nations Partner Portal definition of a women-led organization is one whose leadership is principally made up of women, demonstrated by 50 per cent or more senior leadership positions at both board and staff level occupied by women.

support to improve accountability to affected populations in the two-year period ending in December 2021.

33. This momentum began to bear fruit during the year. After the takeover by the de facto authorities in Afghanistan in August 2021, for example, and with accountability to affected populations integrated into the response plan for that country, UNICEF was able to gain insight into the priorities and evolving needs of affected populations through more than 150,000 U-Reporters. UNICEF also provided technical support to train 42 staff in Afghanistan (including from other United Nations agencies and civil society partners) to better apply the principles and approaches of accountability to affected populations in the humanitarian response. Globally, UNICEF launched Voices of Change, an initiative for people to share feedback and raise concerns about service providers.

34. UNICEF further accelerated protection from sexual exploitation and abuse, including the scale-up of accessible reporting channels. In 2021, UNICEF reached 61 million children and adults in 93 countries through these reporting channels, a nearly tenfold increase from 2017. Integration of prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse into the COVID-19 pandemic response from its outset contributed to the scale-up of this work in 117 UNICEF country offices, with 53 achieving UNICEF benchmarks in this area. While underreporting is still a significant challenge, with the investments made by UNICEF and the global scale-up of internal reporting systems and safe and accessible, community-based reporting channels, survivors are coming forward more often to report sexual exploitation and abuse. The number of allegations reported to UNICEF quadrupled between 2018 and 2021, a positive indication of overall progress in prevention and response to sexual exploitation and abuse.

#### **D. Partnerships at all levels animate the work of UNICEF**

35. Among the most critical partnerships forged in 2021 were those with adolescents and young people. UNICEF engaged 19.6 million adolescents (54 per cent girls) in 125 countries through its programmes (quadruple the target), with 5.7 million of them engaged in humanitarian action and nearly 700,000 on climate change advocacy. This momentum was created by extensive country office efforts to support young people's role in awareness-raising, peer-to-peer support and outreach to communities during the COVID-19 pandemic. It also reflects the increased investment of UNICEF in adolescent engagement, and young people's eagerness to be agents of change in their communities and true partners in actions that affect them.

36. There were also advances in deepening key strategic organizational partnerships. The UNHCR-UNICEF Blueprint for Joint Action for refugee children was rolled out in 10 countries and reached more than 2 million refugee children and their families. Ten additional joint action plans will get under way in 2022. In Iraq, as part of the Blueprint work to support child protection capacity and case management, UNICEF provided incentives for critical social work staff to be trained and coached by UNHCR. In Indonesia, the two agencies successfully advocated for the inclusion of refugees in the roll-out of the national COVID-19 vaccination programme.

37. Through the Partnership Strengthening Initiative, UNICEF and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) mapped 114 different agreements between UNICEF and IFRC, or IFRC National Societies, valued at \$198 million and spanning 58 countries and all UNICEF programmatic areas. This mapping informed new guidance on partnering and simplified partnership

agreements. Pilot work using the new guidance was completed in Honduras, Kyrgyzstan, Nigeria and Tajikistan.

38. UNICEF designated country-level leaders for the clusters it leads or co-leads in 2021 as follows: education in 24 countries, WASH in 16 countries, nutrition in 18 countries and the child protection Area of Responsibility in 19 countries. Clusters have substantially scaled up the cluster coordination performance monitoring exercise conducted yearly. UNICEF enhanced its capacity to lead these clusters, launching an ambitious inter-cluster e-learning initiative (with the potential to also train non-cluster staff); rolling out the Humanitarian Leadership Workshop; and developing a cluster coordination talent management strategy.

39. Tapping into the capacities, assets and networks of the private sector to support stronger national and international humanitarian systems remained a priority in 2021.

40. The Business and Community Resilience Initiative expanded to cover six countries in three regions. Under this initiative, UNICEF country offices for the Eastern Caribbean, Guatemala and Peru incorporated business engagement as a change strategy to achieve national preparedness and resilience goals. UNICEF also aligned with other global, inter-agency initiatives, including the Connecting Business initiative (led by United Nations Development Programme and the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs; the ARISE network (led by the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction); and the One Billion Coalition for Resilience (led by IFRC).

41. A unique model of partnership for humanitarian assistance that tapped into the potential of the private sector was employed in March 2021 after the blast in Bata, Equatorial Guinea that damaged nearly every building in this city of 250,000 people. UNICEF brokered the deployment of experts from private sector standby partner the Veolia Foundation and non-governmental organization standby partner DSS Water to work with UNICEF staff to assess water sources for biological and chemical pollutants following the blast.

42. Virtual networking and brokering remote partnerships have been a necessity during the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite the challenges of doing this type of work remotely, UNICEF has tried to take advantage of the disruption in pre-pandemic ways of doing things to find ways to do things differently, and better. To this end, UNICEF has partnered with a design agency, the Nucleus Group, to develop new ways to use human-centred design methods to enhance its management of public-private partnerships.

#### **IV. The 2021 response to the COVID-19 pandemic**

43. In its second year, the severity of impact of the pandemic on children and families was dictated by each country's epidemiological situation and mediated by (in)equitable access to vaccines, the availability of therapeutics and the level of socioeconomic fallout from the pandemic's long tail of consequences. The COVID-19 pandemic remained a Level 3 emergency during the entirety of 2021.

44. UNICEF responded to the pandemic on two intertwined tracks in 2021. At the global level, UNICEF was the key delivery partner for the COVAX Facility, the vaccine arm of ACT-A. Simultaneously, UNICEF was integral to multi-partner country-level efforts to ensure that children and women stayed safe in the context of the pandemic and retained their access to key services.



## **A. COVAX and the Access to COVID-19 Tools Accelerator**

45. UNICEF led on procurement and delivery of vaccines, diagnostics and therapeutics as part of its work with the COVAX Facility and ACT-A (see paragraph 22, above). UNICEF also provided technical assistance to help 45 countries to scale up their oxygen support systems to enable treatment of severely and critically ill COVID-19 patients. Additionally, through ACT-A, UNICEF helped 106 low- and middle-income countries to implement risk communication and community engagement activities. Throughout the year, UNICEF advocated forcefully for equitable access to vaccines and other COVID-19-related medical products.

46. In November 2021, Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, along with the World Health Organization and other key partners, established the Global COVID-19 Vaccine Delivery Inter-Agency Coordination Structure. In February 2022, the Secretary-General of the United Nations appointed a UNICEF staff member to the position of Global Lead Coordinator for the structure.

## **B. Pandemic response integrated into the work of country and regional offices**

47. The COVID-19 pandemic remained an upheaval within an upheaval in 2021: it made children's needs harder to meet, their rights more difficult to realize. The COVID-19 response within countries aims to protect children and their communities from exposure to COVID-19 and from the impacts of the pandemic. In 2021, the public health emergency and socioeconomic response of UNICEF to the COVID-19 pandemic (i.e., programme activities, planned results and funding requirements) was integrated into country-level plans and into stand-alone country, multi-country and regional Humanitarian Action for Children appeals. Much of the country-level work supported Governments and partners to ensure the continuity of key services (education, health care, socioeconomic support) that are vital to the well-being of children and families.

48. The situation of Venezuelan migrants and refugees in Latin America and Caribbean shows the various ways in which the COVID-19 response has been integrated within a dynamic multi-country humanitarian crisis. UNICEF helped to meet the needs of more than 4.6 million people (Venezuelan migrants and host community members) in the region, with many interventions integrating pandemic response activities, e.g., providing hygiene kits and biosecurity supplies for COVID-19 prevention to migrants and responding to increased protection risks brought on by the pandemic. Some efforts focused on education: in Colombia, the UNICEF flagship flexible learning model for migrant and host-community children, círculos de aprendizaje, adopted biosecurity protocols and safe re-entry plans. In the Plurinational State of Bolivia, migrant children from Venezuela received essential educational materials that supported their access to online and in-person learning.

## **V. Delivering results for children by Strategic Plan Goal Area<sup>10</sup>**

49. Following are key results of UNICEF humanitarian action, organized by Strategic Plan, 2018–2021 Goal Area. The examples provided are indicative, chosen based on the scale of the crisis and the needs of children and families in the particular sector, and the ability to show specific, significant results for children. A more comprehensive accounting of results is provided in the Humanitarian Annual Results

<sup>10</sup> Due to timing, figures in this report may differ from those reported later in the annual reporting cycle in the Humanitarian Annual Results Report.

Report, and in-depth information on context can be found in the Humanitarian Action for Children 2022 appeal.<sup>11</sup> The humanitarian response in 2021 was carried out in line with the 2020 revision of the Core Commitments for Children in Humanitarian Action.<sup>12</sup>

## **A. Goal Area 1: Every child survives and thrives**

50. Supporting every child to survive and thrive is central to the humanitarian action of UNICEF. Work to achieve this in 2021 encompassed nutrition, health, WASH, HIV and AIDS and other programmatic areas.

### **1. Nutrition**

51. Globally, 5 million children with severe acute malnutrition were admitted for treatment supported by UNICEF in 2021.

52. In Chad, one barometer of how deeply the violence, natural disasters (including flooding and rainfall deficits), economic crisis and political instability have affected children is the prevalence of global acute malnutrition in children under 5 years of age, which is 10 per cent. And 2.1 per cent of children under 5 years of age experience severe acute malnutrition. In 2021, UNICEF and partners supported children's access to preventive and curative nutrition services and helped to build the capacity of national and subnational counterparts in nutrition programming. Nearly 250,000 children under 5 years of age received treatment for severe acute malnutrition (85 per cent of the target), with a cure rate of 93 per cent.

### **2. Health**

53. In 2021, 22 million children aged 6 months to 15 years old were vaccinated against measles.

54. In 2021, the Sudan experienced both sudden-onset crises and ongoing hardships. With a large network of partners and in conjunction with the Government, UNICEF supported measles vaccination of 1.3 million children under 1 year of age (exceeding the target of 961,000); integrated management of childhood illnesses services for 2.4 million children (more than doubling the target); and improved access to quality care for newborns and children in primary health centres through training, technical support and knowledge-sharing. UNICEF also helped the Government to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic by facilitating training in infection prevention and control and providing key supplies.

### **3. HIV and AIDS**

55. UNICEF helped to maintain HIV-related services in Zimbabwe against a backdrop of large overall humanitarian need (6.8 million people, including 2.8 million children required urgent humanitarian assistance in 2021) and pandemic disruptions in HIV prevention and treatment services. Through its partners, UNICEF reached 44,376 children, adolescents and pregnant and lactating women (74 per cent of the target) with HIV services and treatment in 2021. Information on HIV and COVID-19 was provided via infomercials; community-based workers also disseminated information on accessing HIV services during pandemic lockdowns.

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<sup>11</sup> See the Humanitarian Action for Children Appeal, available at [www.unicef.org/appeals](http://www.unicef.org/appeals).

<sup>12</sup> The complete UNICEF Core Commitments for Children in Humanitarian Action is available at [www.unicef.org/emergencies/core-commitments-children](http://www.unicef.org/emergencies/core-commitments-children).

## **B. Goal Area 2: Every child learns**

56. In 2021, 38.1 million children living in humanitarian emergencies accessed formal or non-formal learning, including early learning, through the work of UNICEF and its partners.

57. In Mali, 558,400 children and teachers required humanitarian assistance in the country's education sector in 2021, with 1,664 schools closed due to insecurity. Pandemic-related delays in schooling for 3 million children increased their risk of dropping out of school permanently and therefore their risk of experiencing violence, either in their family environment or due to human trafficking or, for girls, the risk of child marriage. UNICEF and partners supported access to education for 209,643 children (including 104,522 girls) in conflict-affected areas through formal and non-formal education interventions. UNICEF also strengthened COVID-19 prevention in schools by delivering COVID-19 WASH kits for infection prevention and control to 2,474 schools and learning spaces.

58. In many countries, UNICEF supported remote learning during periods of school closure and the safe return of children when schools reopened. In India, the high levels of infection caused by the Delta variant of COVID-19 kept millions of children out of school. UNICEF helped to ensure continuity of learning for 21.53 million children (50 per cent girls), out of a target of 24 million students. UNICEF also supported a number of state governments in implementing infection prevention and control, benefiting 218,537 schools (nearly tripling the 65,000 target).

## **C. Goal Area 3: Every child is protected from violence and exploitation**

59. Around 12 million children and caregivers received psychosocial and mental health support through UNICEF work in 2021. Another 13.9 million women, girls and boys accessed interventions aimed at addressing gender-based violence in emergencies.

60. In the Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen, children are subject to grave violations of their rights and exposed to risks of mines and unexploded ordnance. They lack essential health care, are deprived of safe schooling and put under immense psychosocial pressure. Fully 70 per cent of the entire population of Yemen, or 20.7 million people, required humanitarian assistance in 2021. In the Syrian Arab Republic, 72 per cent of the population (more than 13.4 million people) required humanitarian assistance.

61. Protection responses in 2021 included, among other interventions, explosive weapons-related and mine-risk education and survivor support (reaching more than 5.7 million children in Yemen, more than double the target of 2.16 million, and more than 1 million children and their caregivers in the Syrian Arab Republic, 54 per cent of the target); mental health, psychotherapy and psychosocial support (reaching more than 460,000 children and caregivers in Yemen, 52 per cent of the target, and more than 220,000 children in the Syrian Arab Republic, 58 per cent of the target); and interventions to prevent and address gender-based violence (reaching more than 5.3 million women and children in Yemen and meeting 87 per cent of the 6.1 million target, and reaching more than 150,000 women and children in the Syrian Arab Republic, exceeding the 120,000 target). Some of these interventions were delivered alongside COVID-19 prevention efforts.

## **D. Goal Area 4: Every child lives in a safe and clean environment**

62. Through a wide range of implementing partners, UNICEF supported the access of 41.7 million people in humanitarian crises to sufficient safe water for drinking, cooking and hygiene in 2021.

63. By September 2021, 4.2 million people (including 2.1 million children) were internally displaced in Ethiopia due to conflict, drought and seasonal floods. Of these, around 2.1 million people were displaced in the northern regions of Afar, Amhara and Tigray due to conflict. The humanitarian situation in these regions deteriorated significantly in 2021.

64. Among the many needs in the three regions in 2021 were those linked to access to safe water. For example, an August 2021 damage assessment of 2,054 schools, health, education and water facilities in Tigray showed an unprecedented level of destruction and lack of functionality of basic services. Up to 57 per cent of boreholes in Amhara, Afar and Tigray were non-functional due to conflict-related damage and looting, leaving 3.5 million people without access to clean water. Drought and flooding also impacted the availability of clean water. UNICEF provided safe drinking water to 4.9 million people across Ethiopia (including 2.2 million in Amhara, Afar and Tigray), more than double the 2.2 million target; basic WASH supplies to nearly 1.7 million people (45 per cent were part of the northern response); access to basic sanitation facilities to 500,000 people (82 per cent of the target, and 44 per cent of whom were in Amhara, Afar and Tigray); 10,000 litre storage tanks to 57 health facilities, including 8 facilities in the northern regions, to prevent COVID-19 transmission (19 per cent of the target); and cleaning and disinfection equipment and latrine renovation to 38 health facilities (13 per cent of the country's overall target).

65. Obstacles to the humanitarian response in northern Ethiopia included limited fuel and limited market availability of critical WASH supplies in the Amhara, Afar and Tigray regions; insecurity that limited travel and project monitoring; disruption of critical communication facilities; weak local government structures; in Amhara, interruption of power supply in conflict-affected areas; and in Tigray, disruption of cash flow, along with access impediments due to conflict and arbitrary denial of access by parties.

## **E. Goal Area 5: Every child has an equitable chance in life**

### **1. Advancing disability-inclusive humanitarian action**

66. Under UNICEF leadership, inter-agency work strengthened disability inclusion in Humanitarian Needs Overviews and Humanitarian Response Plans in 2021, with UNICEF-led or co-led clusters (education, nutrition, WASH) and the child protection Area of Responsibility playing an important role in driving these changes.

67. The percentage of UNICEF country offices with Humanitarian Action for Children appeals that systematically included children with disabilities in their humanitarian responses increased significantly between 2019 and 2021, from 36 per cent to 55 per cent. Additionally, 21 country office without appeals systematically included children with disabilities in their humanitarian responses.

68. Inclusive education in humanitarian settings has remained a particular challenge due the COVID-19 pandemic. UNICEF and partners met this challenge in the Philippines, in one example by helping 10,975 children with disabilities to access remote or in-person learning as part of the Typhoon Odette and pandemic responses in that country.

69. In 2021, UNICEF focused on the role of social protection and cash transfers in reducing risks, vulnerabilities and barriers faced by children with disabilities. In 28 country programmes, UNICEF provided disability-inclusive/accessible social protection benefits (e.g., cash transfers) in humanitarian situations; disability was systematically included in the cycle of needs assessment, planning and data collection. In Jordan, for example, the cash transfer programme considers specific vulnerability indicators, including those related to disability, to ensure systematic inclusion for children with disabilities. The number of beneficiaries in Jordan supported with cash assistance in 2021 was 17,731 children (51 per cent girls; 10 per cent with disabilities) from 5,754 vulnerable households (90 per cent Syrian; 32 per cent female-headed).

## **2. UNICEF directly funded humanitarian cash transfers on the rise**

70. The number of UNICEF country offices funding and delivering humanitarian cash transfer programmes increased to 52 in 2021, reaching 2.7 million households, up from 50 offices reaching 2.5 million households in 2020. In total, UNICEF-funded programmes provided \$351 million to crisis-affected populations (with \$2 million provided as vouchers), up from \$245 million in 2020, a 43 per cent increase.

71. UNICEF helped to reach an additional 6.8 million households by providing technical assistance to expand government social protection programmes.

72. Through these two modalities (direct funding or technical assistance, or a combination of both) UNICEF-supported humanitarian cash transfers in 2021 reached 9.4 million households, covering 19 million children.

73. Of the 2.7 million households receiving UNICEF-funded humanitarian cash in 2021, 724,000 households (in 20 countries) were reached through direct funding via national social protection programmes, and 1.9 million households (in 38 countries) were reached with direct funding using implementation partnerships with local financial service providers and civil society partners. In some countries, UNICEF used a mixed approach, leveraging elements of the existing national social assistance programmes (e.g., beneficiary lists, social workforce) to deliver directly funded humanitarian cash programmes.

74. The UNICEF Humanitarian Cash Operations and Programme Ecosystem was deployed in seven countries in 2021.<sup>13</sup> Personal data for 397,000 beneficiary households stored in the system were used to deliver \$46 million between March and December 2021. In Afghanistan, for example, the Ecosystem enabled the delivery of life-saving winter cash assistance to 36,459 families in December 2021.

## **3. Empowering adolescents and young people**

75. UNICEF aims to have more robust youth-focused and youth-led programmes and actions in its major humanitarian response efforts – programmes not just for young people, but with them. Adolescent engagement in 2021 far outstripped the UNICEF target (see paragraph 35, above). Nearly all (92 per cent) UNICEF country offices consulted with adolescents in programming processes. However, only 22 per cent did so specifically with marginalized adolescents and girls, well below the target of 60 per cent.

76. In 2021, UNICEF, the Global Refugee Youth Network, the Youth Compact Champions programme and other partners organized the first global training for young humanitarians on the IASC Youth Guidelines. Participating were more than

<sup>13</sup> Afghanistan, Antigua and Barbuda, Bangladesh, Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, South Sudan and the Sudan.

50 youth advocates, who are expected, in turn, to reach many more peers and other local actors.

## VI. Resource mobilization for humanitarian action<sup>14</sup>

77. The initial 2021 Humanitarian Action for Children Appeal requested \$6.4 billion to assist 190.8 million children in need in 149 countries and territories. By December 2021, the total humanitarian requirement had risen to \$7.17 billion due to new crises and protracted emergencies worsening in Afghanistan, Ethiopia, Haiti, India, Madagascar, Mozambique and the Niger, as well as the need to accelerate equitable access to COVID-19 tests, treatments and vaccines.<sup>15</sup>

78. As at 31 December 2021, \$2.96 billion had been received for appeals, representing a 37 per cent increase from the \$2.16 billion received in the same period in 2020. However, overall commitments for non-pandemic needs decreased compared with both 2019 and 2020, reflecting a shifting of priorities by resource partners and the wider economic implications of the COVID-19 response.

79. The bulk of humanitarian funding in 2021 came from public sector partners. However, private sector fundraising levels in 2021 more than doubled compared with 2020, totalling \$521 million – 18 per cent of total funding received.<sup>16</sup> The COVID-19 pandemic coordination across UNICEF and with ACT-A partners helped to generate \$280 million of these private sector funds. The private sector also responded to high-profile non-pandemic emergencies in Afghanistan, Haiti, the Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen, thanks to an immediate UNICEF call to action for all audiences.

80. Quality funding is key for responding to crises, and flexible thematic and multi-year contributions increased in 2021. Thematic humanitarian funds (country, regional and global) reached \$410 million, or 14 per cent of overall humanitarian contributions, more than double the amount in 2020. This uptick, which is a positive development, is predominately thanks to private sector donors (which provided 86 per cent of total thematic funding) and their commitment to support the ACT-A appeal. Some key public sector partners decreased the level of earmarking for humanitarian action: notably, the Government of Germany has provided greater flexibility, with significant support to the COVID-19 response, including ACT-A, in countries prioritized by UNICEF.

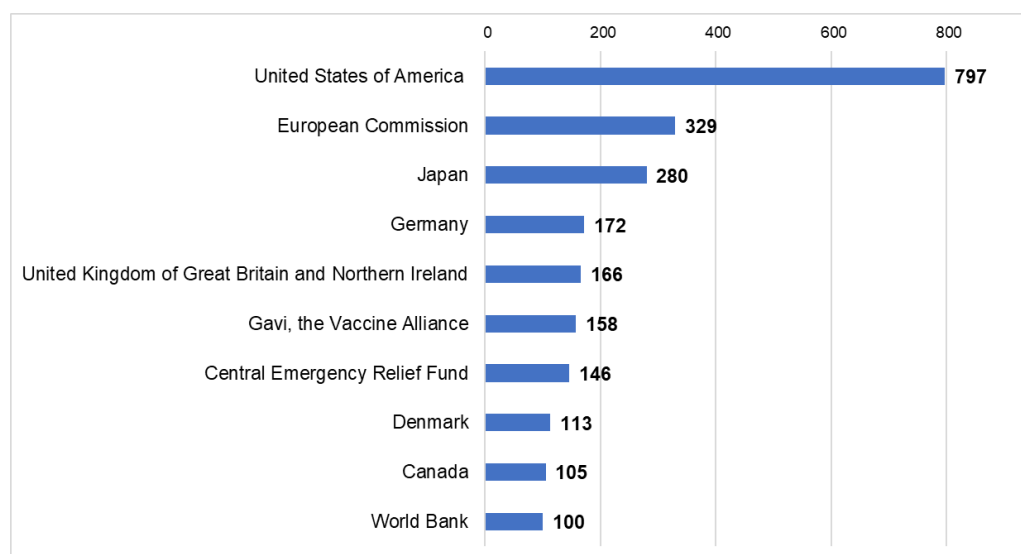
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<sup>14</sup> The 2021 figures presented in this section are provisional and subject to change.

<sup>15</sup> For more information on COVID-19 and ACT-A / COVAX related funding, please see the [Coronavirus disease \(COVID-19\) response: Donors and partners webpage](#).

<sup>16</sup> Since 2017, private sector support each year has averaged 9 per cent in humanitarian contributions to UNICEF.

**Top 10 partners for humanitarian funding in 2021**  
(in millions of United States dollars)



81. Global humanitarian thematic funding – the most flexible resources after regular resources – raised \$39.5 million, a 25 per cent increase compared with 2020.<sup>17</sup> Such funds strengthened UNICEF preparedness in Haiti to respond to new emergency situations, including the rise in violence by armed urban gangs and related population displacements. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, these resources enabled 1,200 children who were recovering from forced displacement to access recreational activities each week, to support their psychological recovery.

82. The top 10 public sector donors accounted for 64 per cent of total funds received in 2021. Sixty-seven per cent of all resources went to the top 10 high-profile emergency responses, including ACT-A, Afghanistan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, the Syrian Arab Republic, the Syrian refugee-hosting countries and Yemen. The other humanitarian appeals remained heavily underfunded. In 2021, UNICEF became the top recipient of funding from the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF), receiving \$145.7 million for 29 emergencies. Funding from CERF was critical in scaling up the Sehatmandi project in Afghanistan, which helped to deliver urgent health care. UNICEF also secured CERF funding for the Ebola response in Côte d’Ivoire, Liberia and Sierra Leone. UNICEF experienced a decline in country-based pooled funds, however, with responses in 12 countries and territories awarded \$22 million, a 48 per cent decrease compared with 2020.

83. International financial institutions played a significant role in complementing humanitarian response efforts and strengthening programming for resilience by helping Governments to address the public health and socioeconomic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. Support to UNICEF ranged from the procurement of supplies to strengthening essential WASH, social protection, education and health systems. The World Bank contributed \$100 million to support the crisis response in Afghanistan and the Asian Development Bank contributed \$9.96 million to pandemic-affected countries and economies in India, the Pacific Islands, Pakistan and the Philippines.

84. Regular resources are also critical to the humanitarian response. In 2021, more than \$178.9 million in regular resources supported humanitarian programmes and

<sup>17</sup> For more information on the global humanitarian thematic funds, please see the [GHTF webpage](#).

life-saving support. Additionally, regular resources contribute to the humanitarian response through allocations made via the Emergency Programme Fund loan mechanism, which fast-tracks resources to affected countries within 48 hours of a crisis. In 2021, \$50.3 million was allocated to 27 countries through this Fund.

### Thematic and non-thematic humanitarian funding trends, 2015–2021

(in millions of United States dollars)

Year	2015		2016		2017		2018		2019		2020		2021	
	\$	%	\$	%	\$	%	\$	%	\$	%	\$	%	\$	%
Non-thematic	1 514	88	1 759	92	1 812	92	1 892	92	1 894	93	1 958	91	2 552	86
Thematic*	204	12	145	8	164	8	154	8	145	7	202	9	410	14
<b>Grand total</b>	<b>1 718</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>1 904</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>1 976</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>2 046</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>2 039</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>2 160</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>2 962</b>	<b>100</b>

\*Thematic figures represent the total amount from the humanitarian action pools at the global, regional and country levels.

## VII. Challenges, lessons learned and actions taken to improve UNICEF humanitarian action, 2018–2021

85. The present report is the final annual update on humanitarian action covering the UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2018–2021. This section recaps lessons learned from major evaluations conducted during the strategic plan period as well as the Humanitarian Review.

86. Challenges in the first years of the Strategic Plan, 2018–2021 centred on the need to balance coverage, predictability, quality and equity of the UNICEF humanitarian response and improve its timeliness. The organization also began to articulate the need for improved humanitarian leadership and capacity and greater accountability for results. Out of these early years of the Strategic Plan were borne the revisions of the emergency procedures and the Core Commitments. Both were completed in 2020 and rolled out in 2021 (the emergency procedures in draft form).

87. These core documents provided strengthened guidance around the emergency response. Additionally, the Humanitarian Review was finalized in 2020 and implementation of its recommendations began in 2021.

88. UNICEF personnel have needed to adapt to the evolving scale, depth and dynamism of humanitarian crises. UNICEF has planted the seeds for creating even stronger leaders for cluster leadership roles and for its responses in complex, high-threat environments by developing a framework for leaderships skills in emergency settings and tailored learning programmes to help its staff acquire these skills. The Humanitarian Leadership Workshop was further developed into several modules and rolled out in 2021, with planned participation by 100 senior UNICEF field managers each year. This focus on cultivating strong and sensitive leadership that is able to deliver results for children in even the most challenging circumstances is expected to pay dividends for many years to come.

89. Making partnerships – with public and private sector donors and other partners, implementing partners, procurement partners and advocates – work better for children has been an ambition of UNICEF throughout the Strategic Plan period. This is an ongoing process. At the global level, examples include strengthening the partnership with the World Health Organization for emergency health-related responses, including the response to the COVID-19 pandemic; significant growth in UNICEF partnerships with the international financial institutions, including the



World Bank Group; and deepening and improving partnerships with UNHCR and IFRC, among others. Innovative partnerships with the private sector are also accelerating.

90. The need to empower local partners and foster a more localized approach to humanitarian assistance was noted over the years of the Strategic Plan, 2018–2021 as a critical challenge. UNICEF has exceeded a key target of providing 25 per cent of humanitarian funding to local and national partners, but there is much more to do. Specific, mandatory benchmarks on localization of the humanitarian response were included in the revised Core Commitments, and UNICEF is also developing a strategy on localization.

91. Similarly, improving accountability to affected populations has been a key challenge throughout the Strategic Plan period. UNICEF has established mechanisms for such accountability in many of its humanitarian responses, but consistent systems to act on the feedback received and adapt programmes accordingly have been lacking.

92. The Humanitarian Review articulated one of the key challenges facing UNICEF throughout the Strategic Plan period: how to carry out action in the face of uncertainty to better serve children. This includes better identifying risks and setting up ways to act on these identified risks more quickly and effectively. It was recommended that UNICEF define its “risk appetite” to effectively prepare for and mitigate risks and, ultimately, deliver a better response for children in times of crisis. The last year of the Strategic Plan saw progress in this area.

93. Humanitarian access was identified as a critical challenge during the second half of the Strategic Plan period. Accessing people in need is not a new challenge, nor is it one unique to UNICEF. In 2021, some long-term work on improving UNICEF capacity to push for and obtain access to populations in need came to fruition. The organization released guidelines (for the leadership and field-based practitioners) on humanitarian engagement with armed non-State actors when operationally or programmatically necessary. UNICEF also finalized the Access Field Manual, to be disseminated in 2022; and it piloted, in the Libya Country Office, the organization’s first dedicated humanitarian access training course. These efforts are expected to lead to better and more consistent access to populations in difficult environments. Yet the challenge of access will remain significant as the number of humanitarian responses occurring in complex and high-threat environments continues to rise.

94. Nearly one half of the Strategic Plan period overlapped with the COVID-19 pandemic. To the many challenges and aspirations guiding UNICEF (e.g., equity, quality, timeliness, leadership, ability to accept risk, improving preparedness, better accountability and the need to more effectively press for humanitarian access) were added the additional challenges of the humanitarian response in the COVID-19 era. These challenges have included “staying and delivering”, adapting to limitations on in-person work and deployments (a situation that improved somewhat in 2021) and the need to reach more children than ever. Yet finding ways to meet children’s needs during the pandemic has also fostered new ways of operating and opened up new avenues for delivering programmes.

95. Finally, present throughout the four years of the Strategic Plan, 2018–2021 was the need for greater levels of unrestricted funding for humanitarian action. There are signs of progress: Thematic funding ranged from 7 to 9 per cent of humanitarian funding during the first three years of the Plan but jumped to 14 per cent in 2021.

## **VIII. The way forward during the new Strategic Plan period**

96. There are key goals that will animate UNICEF work in 2022 and throughout the Strategic Plan, 2022–2025. These directions are signposted by the needs of children and families and what they will require to realize their rights in a context of humanitarian crisis.

97. UNICEF continues to:

- (a) Ensure that the right human resources are in place for humanitarian action;
- (b) Strengthen its response to mass population displacements and protracted crises;
- (c) Increase the coverage and quality of its humanitarian assistance;
- (d) Recognize the profoundly different and gendered impacts of crises on women and men, and girls and boys;
- (e) Advocate for the central role of protection, with particular attention to specialized protection services for children in armed conflicts;
- (f) Grow organizational capacity to support, operate and deliver critical services to the most vulnerable children in remote, insecure, high-risk and complex humanitarian emergencies.

98. As called for by the Humanitarian Review, UNICEF is undertaking transformational whole-of-organization change. The organization is cultivating stronger humanitarian leadership and greater skills-building and learning in key technical areas. UNICEF is already improving preparedness and conflict-sensitive risk-informed programming, and reinforcing technical capacities, particularly in public health emergencies and migration crises, and investing in new implementation modalities to respond effectively and efficiently to the needs of children. Such change is supported by the revised Core Commitments for Children in Humanitarian Action and by the development of the new emergency procedures.

99. UNICEF is expanding its preparedness, anticipatory action and risk analysis work. A dedicated team at UNICEF headquarters is addressing those issues and providing direct technical support to country and regional offices. They are working to catalyse preparedness action not only within UNICEF, but in the United Nations system and the broader humanitarian community.

100. UNICEF actively promotes cooperation around accountability to affected populations at the inter-agency level. In 2022 and beyond, UNICEF will continue to prioritize supporting country offices to establish accountability mechanisms and ensure that systematic engagement with affected people guides evidence-based decision-making in all programming.

## **IX. Conclusion**

101. All children have inalienable rights. Its mandate gives UNICEF the privilege of helping children living through humanitarian crises to realize these rights before, during and after emergencies. UNICEF is dedicated to using all the resources it has – human and financial, expertise and experience, the capacity for partnership and adaptation, and a vision of hope for the future that is so sorely needed at this time – to make children’s lives better, in every country where the organization works.

## **X. Draft decision**

*The Executive Board*

*Takes note* of the annual report on UNICEF humanitarian action  
([E/ICEF/2022/13](#)).

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