



Praneeth, 3, undergoes treatment for malnutrition at a UNICEF-supported facility.

unicef 
for every child

Humanitarian Action for Children

Sri Lanka

HIGHLIGHTS¹

- An acute economic crisis since early 2022 has caused severe food insecurity in Sri Lanka, and the situation is predicted to deteriorate between October 2022 and February 2023.² An estimated 6.2 million people (28 per cent of the population) are moderately acute food insecure, while 66,000 people are severely acute food insecure.³ Two in five households (41.8 per cent) spend more than 75 per cent of their expenditures on purchasing food,⁴ leaving little to spend on health and education. Many families have exhausted their savings and are struggling due to crippling inflation.
- UNICEF will prioritize access to basic social services to reduce the need for vulnerable families to resort to negative coping strategies. UNICEF will address humanitarian needs through existing systems, where possible, and incorporate community-based approaches where relevant.
- UNICEF requires US\$28.3 million to meet critical needs linked to nutrition, social protection and humanitarian cash transfers, education and child protection among the most vulnerable children and families affected by the economic crisis.

6.2 million people^{5,6} **IN NEED**
2.9 million children⁷

2022 2023

3.5 million people⁸ **TO BE REACHED**
2.4 million children⁹

2022 2023

FUNDING REQUIREMENTS

US\$ 28.3 million

2022 2023

KEY PLANNED TARGETS



1.2 million

children and women accessing primary healthcare



430,000

children receiving micronutrient powder



665,690

children receiving individual learning materials



121,769

households reached with UNICEF-funded humanitarian cash transfers

Figures are provisional and subject to change upon finalization of the 2023 inter-agency needs and priorities and the availability of final results from the ongoing assessments.

HUMANITARIAN SITUATION AND NEEDS

Sri Lanka is in the middle of an acute economic crisis that is expected to continue throughout 2023, with an estimated 6.2 million people, including 2.9 million children, in urgent need of humanitarian assistance in 2023.¹⁰ In a context of soaring inflation,¹¹ heightened income insecurity and scarce availability of essential products (e.g., food, fuel, fertilizers and medicines), families are unable to meet their basic needs. Throughout 2022, recurring and frequent natural hazards continued to affect the agriculture sector, contributing to low yields. With the forecast 40 per cent reduction in food production compared with previous years, food insecurity could further deteriorate from October 2022 to February 2023.¹² While 5.3 million people were already skipping meals as a coping strategy,¹³ this number is expected to increase drastically in the coming months with the combined impact of climate-induced natural hazards and a political impasse.

From an already alarming nutrition situation in the country,¹⁴ particularly 'very high' wasting, according to World Health Organization thresholds,¹⁵ the child malnutrition level is projected to worsen in the coming months. Provision of safe drinking water, particularly in water-scarce rural and estate areas, is hampered due to lack of funding for operation, maintenance and importation of water treatment chemicals. If the situation is not addressed urgently, children will be at a significant risk of waterborne diseases.¹⁶ Essential health services have been severely affected by critical shortages of medicines, affecting pregnant and lactating women and children.¹⁷

Schools remained closed for most of 2022 until mid-August amid a worsening fuel shortage, and this disrupted learning for 4.8 million children and increased mental health and psychosocial issues.¹⁸ School attendance is frequently low among students and teachers, particularly those in rural schools, due to transportation issues, economic challenges and limited provision of school meals, which discourages school attendance.¹⁹

Child protection issues increased significantly in 2022, especially in rural and estate areas.²⁰ Children face protection challenges, with more parents seeking to admit them to childcare institutions due to increasing food insecurity, poverty²¹ and internal and external labour migration.²²

Sri Lanka's social protection system, characterized by high levels of fragmentation, weak coordination, low coverage and large exclusion errors and limited adequacy of benefits, is not yet prepared to respond to a shock of this magnitude and to provide reliable protection to all vulnerable groups and prevent negative coping strategies. Without urgent and robust humanitarian support, the current crisis will have progressive, long-lasting consequences for all children.

SECTOR NEEDS



2.8 million children and women requiring nutrition services²³



2 million children in need of MHPSS services²⁴



1.1 million children in need of education support²⁵



2.3 million people lack access to safe water²⁶



480,187 lactating mothers in need of cash assistance²⁷

STORY FROM THE FIELD



The children marched in a line, beaming with smiles as they received a pack of stationery that includes pencils, worksheets and other essential items for learning. Their school, located in a tea estate area in Uva Province, educates children from poor families who mainly earn a living from working on the tea plantations. The economic crisis that Sri Lanka faces has disrupted the importation of school stationery, and prices for supplies that are available on the market have skyrocketed, putting them beyond the reach of many families and children.

[Read more about this story here](#)

Children at the Galkanda primary school in Uva Province beam with smiles after receiving stationery provided by UNICEF.

Since the onset of the economic crisis in Sri Lanka, UNICEF has continued to support the strengthening of the government-led systems through the complementary provision of life-saving assistance. This work is carried out in partnership with other United Nations agencies and civil society organizations and addresses the needs of vulnerable children and families to ensure development gains are not lost. In 2023, UNICEF aims to support the most vulnerable children who have been negatively impacted by the economic crisis and support the Government of Sri Lanka and partners to design and implement effective response and recovery strategies.

Guided by the Core Commitments for Children in Humanitarian Action, UNICEF will reach vulnerable children and women with essential services; strengthen integrated systems to build community resilience;²⁹ and scale up preparedness and early warning efforts to monitor the evolving situation.

UNICEF will assist government systems in maintaining and improving the quality of health and nutrition services and platforms for both preventive and curative care at the facility and community level for girls and boys, women and vulnerable communities.³⁰ UNICEF will help to ensure safe drinking water in rural and estate areas by providing supplies to complete water projects that have been on hold due to lack of government funding and by mainstreaming climate-resilient WASH and water safety planning assistance.

UNICEF will strengthen and expand preventive measures that address child protection risks and respond to the needs of vulnerable children. UNICEF will work with partners to reinforce emergency case management services for the most vulnerable children, including separated children and children with disabilities. Providing mental health and psychosocial support in schools and communities will be an integral part of protection interventions.

Building on the existing programmes on child-centred disaster risk reduction, UNICEF will ensure opportunities for adolescents and youth to participate meaningfully in humanitarian response and disseminate accurate life-saving information for preparedness and climate action.

UNICEF will continue to prioritize quality formal education in protective environments in coordination with partners, ensuring uninterrupted learning for vulnerable children in small, resource-poor, rural schools island-wide. Social protection services, especially cash interventions targeting pregnant women and mothers/primary caretakers of young children, will be highly prioritized to address the consequences of economic crisis.

UNICEF leads the nutrition, education, protection, WASH and social protection sectors and plays a key role in the health and food security sectors and in the cash working group. UNICEF and partners continue to assess the situation and will remain agile in responding to the most vulnerable children as conditions evolve.



Health

- **1,236,480** children and women accessing primary healthcare in UNICEF-supported facilities



Nutrition

- **47,567** children 6-59 months with severe wasting admitted for treatment
- **320,000** primary caregivers of children 0-23 months receiving infant and young child feeding counselling
- **430,000** children 6-59 months receiving micronutrient powder
- **100,000** pre-school children reached through school feeding program



Child protection, GBVIE and PSEA

- **1,994,400** children, adolescents and caregivers accessing community-based mental health and psychosocial support³¹
- **400** women, girls and boys accessing gender-based violence risk mitigation, prevention and/or response interventions³²
- **5,000** children who have received individual case management³³
- **2,000** girls and boys assisted through access to assistive devices and specialized services
- **2,000** people who have access to a safe and accessible channels to report child sexual exploitation and abuse



Education³⁴

- **665,690** children accessing formal or non-formal education, including early learning
- **665,690** children receiving individual learning materials



Water, sanitation and hygiene

- **200,000** people accessing a sufficient quantity and quality of water for drinking and domestic needs
- **5,000** women and girls accessing menstrual hygiene management services
- **50,000** children using safe and appropriate WASH facilities and hygiene services in learning facilities and safe spaces
- **400,000** people reached with critical WASH supplies



Social protection

- **121,769** households reached with UNICEF-funded humanitarian cash transfers³⁵

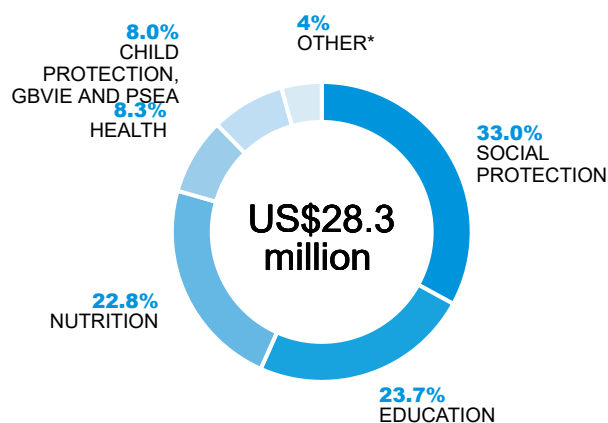


Cross-sectoral (HCT, SBC, RCCE and AAP)

- **500,000** people reached through messaging on prevention and access to services
- **35,000** parents and caregivers provided with messages on positive parenting and mental health and psychosocial support
- **110,000** people with access to established feedback and accountability mechanisms

FUNDING REQUIREMENTS IN 2023

UNICEF is appealing for US\$28.3 million in 2023 to respond to the urgent needs of 3.5 million people, including 2.4 million children, amid the country's deepening socioeconomic crisis. This will be achieved through access to nutrition, health, education, child protection and WASH services and risk mitigation of severe negative coping mechanisms. UNICEF expects to promote a mix of activities: support to basic services, cash- and voucher-based and in-kind assistance and community engagement. This support will enable UNICEF to ensure inclusive and integrated approaches for vulnerable groups, including people with disabilities. Efforts will also strengthen prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse and scale up preparedness and resilience for the rapidly escalating humanitarian situation. UNICEF will prioritize the social protection, education, nutrition, health and child protection sectors in 2023. If adequate humanitarian support to the most vulnerable and marginalized children and their families is not provided on time, the current crisis will have progressive, long-lasting consequences on their lives, and the cost of recovery and meeting the unaddressed needs would only increase.



Sector	2023 requirements (US\$)
Health	2,337,000
Nutrition	6,432,900
Child protection, GBVIE and PSEA	2,248,440
Education	6,701,040
Water, sanitation and hygiene	984,000 ³⁶
Social protection	9,319,232 ³⁷
Cross-sectoral (HCT, SBC, RCCE and AAP)	246,000
Total	28,268,612

*This includes costs from other sectors/interventions : Water, sanitation and hygiene (3.5%), Cross-sectoral (HCT, SBC, RCCE and AAP) (<1%).

Who to contact for further information:

Christian Skoog
Representative, Sri Lanka
T +9477 373 3781
cskoog@unicef.org

Manuel Fontaine
Director, Office of Emergency Programmes (EMOPS)
T +1 212 326 7163
mfontaine@unicef.org

June Kunugi
Director, Public Partnerships Division (PPD)
T +1 212 326 7118
jkunugi@unicef.org

ENDNOTES

1. COVID-19 remains a Public Health Emergency of International Concern as declared by the World Health Organization in January 2020. On 1 July 2022, UNICEF deactivated its Level 3 Sustained Phase for the global COVID-19 pandemic response. All activities related to COVID-19 pandemic response, including programme targets and funding requirements, have been shifted into regular development programming and operations. While UNICEF's Level 3 emergency response phase of the COVID-19 pandemic was deactivated, the organization is continuing to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on children, their families and their communities and on the social systems they rely on.
2. Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and World Food Programme (WFP), FAO/WFP Crop and Food Security Assessment Mission (CFSAM) to the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka: Special report, FAO and WFP, Rome, September 2022.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.
6. UNICEF is committed to needs-based targeting, which means covering the unmet needs of children; and will serve as the provider of last resort where it has cluster coordination responsibilities.
7. This figure was calculated based on 861,300 children under age 5 in need of micronutrient powders and 1,994,400 secondary school children requiring mental health and psychosocial support.
8. This figure was calculated based on the children targeted for Multiple Micro Nutrient (MMN) (430,000); primary caregivers of newborn babies supported with infant and young child feeding and growth monitoring (320,000); children in secondary schools targeted for mental health and psychosocial support in schools (1,994,400); and people accessing primary health care facilities, including only the adult population after removing duplication with the infant and young child feeding target (794,503). Of the total people to be reached, 51 per cent are women/girls and 0.3 per cent are adults and children with disabilities.
9. This figure was calculated based on the children targeted for Multiple Micro Nutrient (MMN) (430,000) and children in secondary schools targeted for mental health and psychosocial support in schools (1,994,400). Of the total children to be reached, around 51 per cent are women/girls and 0.3 per cent are children with disabilities.
10. FAO/WFP Crop and Food Security Assessment Mission.
11. Headline inflation (year-on-year) increased to 69.8 per cent in September 2022 from 64.3 per cent in August 2022. The inflation rate in the country was as low as 14.2 per cent in January 2022 and increased to 29.8 per cent in April after the onset of the crisis in March 2022. In addition, food inflation (year-on-year) increased to 94.9 per cent in September from 25 per cent in January 2022. Source: Central Bank of Sri Lanka press releases on inflation, available at <www.cbsl.gov.lk/en/press/press-releases/inflation>.
12. FAO/WFP Crop and Food Security Assessment Mission.
13. Ibid.
14. Nationally, 17.3 per cent of children under five are stunted, 15.1 per cent are wasted and 20.5 per cent are underweight. Source: Department of Census and Statistics, Ministry of National Policies and Economic Affairs and Ministry of Health, Nutrition and Indigenous Medicine, Sri Lanka Demographic and Health Survey 2016, September 2017. Furthermore, according to the national nutrition survey conducted in 2017, wasting and stunting prevalence among school children aged 6-12 years was 30.2 per cent and 11.1 per cent, respectively.
15. For wasting, World Health Organization thresholds are: 'very low' (<2.5 per cent), 'low' (2.5 to 5 per cent), 'medium' (5 to 10 per cent), 'high' (10 to 15 per cent) and 'very high' (>15 per cent).
16. In the estate sector, 66.8 per cent of households do not have access to safe drinking water sources. Source: Sri Lanka Household Income and Expenditure Survey - 2019. Furthermore, more than 48.5 per cent of households in the country do not practise any water treatment methods, such as boiling or chlorinating.
17. Samaraweera, Buddhika, "National Hospital operations hit by shortages", The Morning, 28 September 2022, available at <www.themorning.lk/national-hospital-operations-hit-by-shortages/>.
18. Save the Children, Sri Lanka closes schools for fourth time this year amid worsening fuel shortage, press release, Save the Children Sri Lanka, 22 June 2022.
19. Jayakody, Senuka, "More Lankan children going to school on empty stomachs", The Sunday Times, 25 September 2022.
20. Complex Humanitarian Crisis in Somaweera Lanka: Needs assessment, September 2022, International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and Sri Lanka Red Cross Society, presentation to the Humanitarian Country Team, 12 October 2022.
21. Thambiah, Mirudhula, "Northern families forced to give up children to foster care", The Morning, 27 September 2022, available at <www.themorning.lk/northern-families-forced-to-give-up-children-to-foster-care/>.
22. Outward labour migration increased by a record 286 percent year-on-year January–May 2022. Source: "Outward labour migration up by record 286% up to May", The Daily Mirror Online, 27 May 2022, available at <www.dailymirror.lk/business-news/Outward-labour-migration-up-by-record-286-up-to-May/273-237829>.
23. Based on the needs identified in the Humanitarian Needs and Priorities for Sri Lanka revision as of 18 October 2022.
24. Total adolescents in secondary schools who are in need of mental health and psychosocial support services in communities and at school.
25. Based on the needs identified in the Humanitarian Needs and Priorities for Sri Lanka revision as of 18 October 2022 (excluding the mental health and psychosocial support requirement in schools, as this is included under child protection needs).
26. Based on the WASH needs identified in the Humanitarian Needs and Priorities revisions as of 18 October 2022.
27. Mothers with young children aged 5-24 months, calculated based on the Household Income and Expenditure Survey 2019 data.
28. UNICEF is committed to empowering 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. A more localized response will improve humanitarian action and is fundamental to achieving better accountability to affected populations.
29. Humanitarian response is channeled through existing government and community systems to ensure that both humanitarian and development work are more effectively connected, and that they work to achieving collective results that reduce humanitarian needs and vulnerabilities.
30. This includes the provision of gap supplies - such as therapeutic food for treatment of children with severe wasting, micronutrient supplements, anthropometry equipment - and conducting outreach clinics so that treatment is more accessible to vulnerable communities.
31. Total number of secondary school children targeted for mental health and psychosocial support services through teachers at school and in communities. In addition, 6,000 children and primary caregivers will be targeted for these services at the community level.
32. This will be implemented under the case management intervention, targeting girls and boys, because women will be covered by other United Nations agencies.
33. Emergency case management includes life-saving services, a care plan, mental health and psychosocial support, Fit Persons allowance and supporting girls and boys who are survivors of gender-based violence.
34. All children in resource-poor type 3 schools across the country are targeted for this assistance.
35. In line with the Core Commitments for Children in Humanitarian Action, UNICEF promotes unrestricted and unconditional humanitarian cash transfers. UNICEF support focuses on extending support for pregnant women and mothers with young children aged 5-24 months.
36. Water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) programming aims in 2023 to prioritize targeting vulnerable populations living in remote rural areas and the estate sector who have difficulties accessing safe drinking water, and on provision of WASH supplies to complete rural water projects that are on hold due to lack of government funding. UNICEF will complement this activity by mainstreaming climate-resilient WASH and water safety planning assistance.
37. UNICEF coordinates with the Government of Sri Lanka and all other organizations providing social protection/cash assistance for the economic crisis by leading the UN Social Protection Results Group and being an active member of the humanitarian sectors including nutrition, food security and the cash working group. In addition, UNICEF works closely with the Department of National Planning and other relevant Ministries to ensure system strengthening of the existing social protection schemes, with technical assistance on grievances/feedback mechanisms and data sharing with the launch of Humanitarian Cash Operation and Programme Ecosystem (HOPE) platform in Sri Lanka in 2023. All necessary planning to launch the HOPE platform in 2023 is currently ongoing with guidance and close collaboration with EMOPS and HCT team in HQ.